August 12, 2021

Dear Faculty and Instructional Staff,

I’m writing to provide some clarifications on fall classroom planning following the updated expectations on face coverings that were announced by Chancellor Gallo earlier this week. This guidance will only continue until the COVID-19 transmission rates in Pierce County drop back below “substantial transmission” levels. It is important that we approach the beginning of fall semester with the assumption that all individuals in public indoor spaces will be expected to wear face coverings, including the classroom, when they are unable to physically distance by six or more feet. I recognize that this may create discomfort for some students and could also impact the effectiveness of their learning. For instructors, this may also create challenges in their ability to remain engaged with their classes at the same level as in the past. With these challenges in mind, please consider the following:

1. Instructors may choose not to wear face coverings while teaching if they are able to maintain six-foot distancing from their classes. This may be more easily achieved in some spaces than others. Instructors have the freedom to make adjustments to teaching spaces to allow this to happen as long as it doesn’t impact the room capacity and comfort of students.

2. Please do not modify the format of your courses to virtual learning at this time. It is important that we continue all courses in the same format as originally posted during registration with the exception of #3 below.

3. If the recent change in the COVID-19 situation creates an elevated risk to you due to a medical condition such that you are requesting to change the format of your course, please follow the employee disability accommodation process by completing the reasonable accommodation request form found here and work with your department chair, Dean’s Office, and Human Resources to request approval.

At this point there are no changes being made to classroom capacities or other gathering protocols beyond the expectation that face coverings will be worn when safe physical distancing is not possible. We will continue to monitor the situation and send further updates as conditions change in Pierce County and surrounding communities.
Meanwhile, our top priority is to encourage individuals to get vaccinated in hopes of reducing the spread and allowing us to get back to pre-COVID-19 conditions in the classroom. Vaccination clinics are being held on campus August 30 and September 1 for students and employees. Please review the Protect the Nest campaign to better understand ways that we are incentivizing students to get vaccinated and help get the message out!

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work through this latest COVID-19 challenge.

David

Dr. David Travis
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