



Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation

American Federation of Teachers, Local 3544, AFL-CIO

Date: January 5, 2022

From: Mel Keller, President, Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation

To: Janet Woodruff-Borden, Executive Vice Provost, University of Oregon

Executive Vice Provost Woodruff-Borden,

The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation recommends the University of Oregon take more stringent measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant during Winter Term 2022.

Considering the extremely transmissible nature of the Omicron variant and the unprecedented, recent COVID-19 surge in the US, we expect that the return to campus that began on January 3 will only increase the number of COVID-19 cases on campus and in the broader Eugene community.

UO's Covid Case Tracker was recently updated to show 154 new cases for the past week, and the daily case count for January 3rd alone was well above the *weekly* case count from any week in Fall term. This represents a 492% increase in new cases since the previous week. To put that into perspective, Lane County had a 103% weekly increase in the same period. UO's rapidly increasing cases are a public health concern.

We're still at full capacity this week, with many community members wearing cloth masks or surgical masks. Compared to N95 and KN95 masks, cloth and surgical masks have shown to be less effective at protecting against Covid in general, especially for the prolonged, non-distanced exposure that is possible in a college class. These masks have also shown to be less effective at preventing the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant in particular. This poses a serious health risk for not only GTFF members, but also the entire campus community.

It is heartening that the University is requiring boosters, but the January 31 deadline for boosters will still create unsafe conditions on campus for the first four weeks of Winter Term, compounding the above concerns.

For these reasons, the Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation is asking for two policies to be implemented:

- We request that the University of Oregon moves classes online for two weeks, or until cases decrease to a reasonable level to allow community members to avoid exposure to Covid during the current, unprecedented spike in new cases. This would also allow adequate time for students, staff, faculty, and GEs to get the booster and avoid the infection window of the past week's severe increase in infectious cases.
- We request that the University of Oregon requires and provides N95 or KN95 masks to students, staff, GEs, and faculty, since studies have shown these are the most effective at preventing Omicron transmission.

We believe temporarily pivoting to online instruction and providing effective masks would help keep our university safe. We view these issues as urgent matters of workplace safety and public health, which we take very seriously. We would be willing to meet with the University further to discuss these proposals and ways that we can keep its employees and students safe during a world-altering pandemic.

Mel Keller
President, GTFF