UNIVERSITY STAFF ADVISORY COUNCIL
WEB SUBMISSIONS
August 2021

The following web submissions will be discussed during the August 10, 2021 meeting.

Below are a number of related web submissions concerning the new holiday and leave policies announced in late June by HR.

**Idea/Rationale:** Could UR develop an inclusive religious holiday observance policy that provides paid holiday time off for the religious observances of all faiths? As we become a more inclusive campus, UR has an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and equity by creating a holiday policy that allows staff to develop an inclusive religious holiday observance policy that provides paid holiday time off for the religious observances of all faiths? As we become a more inclusive campus, UR has an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and equity by creating a holiday policy that allows staff from all religious faiths the ability to take paid time off for major religious holidays. We want to UR to be a place where all feel welcome and accepted, including their faiths. This would best be demonstrated by creating an inclusive holiday policy from all religious faiths the ability to take paid time off for major religious holidays. We want to UR to be a place where all feel welcome and accepted, including their faiths. This would best be demonstrated by creating an inclusive holiday policy.

**Idea/Rationale:** Are low-level UR staff members really valued or appreciated here anymore? Does USAC care about the fair treatment of support services staff members? Should the university be allowed grandfather staff members into a policy only to strip them of the same when they feel like it? I feel like the answer is no to that question right now in light of the recent change to the holiday leave policy. I work in a very underappreciated police department on campus. The overall morale in our department is very low right now. This would be understandable if we only considered the current state and poor perception of law enforcement in the United States today. Here at UR, however, our police department has been proven to be a model department that most colleges would dream of having. We make sacrifices to our work-life balance that most staff members are unaware of. And while I realize that comes with the territory in a law enforcement profession, I feel that UR has now gone out of its way to further demoralize police officers and other unrespected professions on campus. The holiday policy change is a recent example of this. Eight or so years ago, our department was asked to participate in a new leave policy for staff members. Some liked the new plan, others like the old plan. The end result of this was that HR granted grandfather status to staff members who wished to stay on the old holiday plan. Fast forward to now where HR decides unilaterally to force everybody to a new holiday policy and strip police officers of the holiday policy that the university said that they could keep while choosing to grant grandfather status to a different department on campus. In my opinion, staff members who either opted into or were forced into the new holiday plan in our department have shown an increase in the use of sick time from work just to get a break. I have also seen a decline in mental health and an increase in stress due to the lack of time off. I do not feel that this change is a positive one for our department and believe that negative ramifications will result sometime in the future.
Response: This web submission was sent to HR. The following response by Carl Sorensen was received August 10, 2021.

We made the change to the holiday pay policy after discussing with leaders in several departments including Public Safety. We learned that it was difficult for managers to manage schedules with a flexible holiday and that most employees elected to be paid double time for the time worked. It is true that some employees, due to the requirements of their role, must work some holidays but, employees and managers are encouraged to work together so that no single employee is required to work all or most holidays. In addition, the University now provides 15 – 20 vacation days and 16 holidays for all employees. Employees and managers are encouraged to work together to make sure these are used in a way that most effectively meets the needs of the employee and the department.

Idea/Rationale: Regarding the new holiday policy, when one has a holiday off it will no longer be counted as time worked. There are a number of "overtime" events on campus (e.g. basketball games, football games, others) that require evening and night staffing by electricians, plumbers, police, and other staff. Does that University expect that we will be volunteering to cover these events for straight time pay, are they going to force us to show up for these events for straight time, or do they have a plan to hire the personnel necessary to cover these events? I can foresee serious staffing issues if they plan to force employees to work overtime for straight time pay. Police are already losing 120 hours of time off vs. other employees each year. This policy is in direct conflict with HR's statement that they promote a work/life balance. USAC should at least pressure them to remove that garbage from their website in light of recent policies.

Response: This web submission was sent to HR. The following response by Carl Sorensen was received August 10, 2021.

The decision to follow the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) was made in order to reward those required to work on a holiday. Prior to the change, those who did not work on the holiday were eligible for the same pay as those who worked the holiday. This change recognizes and rewards the extra contributions of those required to work on a holiday. All non-exempt employee will be paid overtime for hours worked above 40 in a given work week. Examples of the policy in practice can be found here overtime-holiday-examples (richmond.edu)

The web submissions above were discussed during July’s closed session. The discussion will continue in our August meeting.

Idea/Rationale: Why are we calling the COVID-19 vaccine a requirement when we are allowing so many exceptions and not requiring it until it has full CDC approval rather than the Emergency Approval it is currently available under? The "strong personal convictions" exception, allowed only for the COVID-19 vaccine, makes no sense, breaks from current policy, and only seems to pander
to a politically driven conspiracy theory. How can we say we are requiring a vaccine when we are allowing such exemptions?

**Response:** This web submission was sent to HR on July 6, 2021. The following response by Carl Sorensen was received August 10, 2021.

We currently have very high rates of vaccination in our community. As of August 6th, 92.6% of students and 91.4% of full-time faculty and staff are fully vaccinated. There are many faculty staff and students in our community who have very strong personal reasons for not getting the vaccinated and it is important that we allow this personal choice. We are requiring all unvaccinated members of our community to wear masks when indoors or in outdoor settings when physical distancing is not possible.

**Idea/Rationale:** It has been close to a month now after the vaccine requirement has been announced, and there are still some important questions that remain un-answered. These include: Is there a timeline for when further details are expected to be released? What will the criteria be for evaluating each category of exemption? How long will those who are waiting for FDA approval or had their exemption request denied have to get vaccinated? How soon will people who requested exemptions know whether their request was granted?

**Response:** This web submission was sent to HR on July 12, 2021. The following response by Carl Sorensen was received August 10, 2021.

All exemption requests have been reviewed and employees have been informed of the decisions. All employees with approved exemptions are required to wear masks when indoors or in outdoor settings when physical distancing is not possible. Once the FDA approves one of the vaccines, the University will provide a reasonable time period for those who are waiting for FDA approval to get vaccinated.

**Idea/Rationale:** Do staff members who teach have discretion to require masks in their classroom in the fall semester? Do individual departments or offices have the discretion to require masks? In the June 10 email from University leadership, it states "During the fall semester, faculty will have the discretion to require all students to wear a mask in their classroom or lab if they so choose." A number of staff members also teach courses (EX: WELL 100 and WELL 101). What discretion do staff have to require masks in different spaces? Does this apply to those who teach classes? To individual or ongoing extra-curricular programs or trainings? If faculty can require students to wear masks in a lab, can individual staff members require others to wear a mask in their office or workspace? Can department heads determine that masks are required in the spaces/building of that particular department?

**Response:** This web submission was answered by Shannon Sinclair, and the response is copied below.
The University’s mask policy is designed to comply with guidance from the CDC and the Virginia Department of Health and to allow for consistent implementation across the campus community. As a reminder, our current policy requires all those who are not fully vaccinated to wear a mask when inside or in outside locations where physical distancing is not possible. The policy also supports voluntary mask use by those who are fully vaccinated.

We recognize that the fall will bring changes to our campus as in-person interactions replace the many virtual engagements we endured during the last academic year and that, in certain situations, people may be more comfortable with in-person encounters when the other person is wearing a mask. At the same time, it is not feasible to have inconsistent mask requirements depending upon what building or department people are in.

In order to strike an appropriate balance, we will update the University’s current mask policy to include the following:

- Any faculty or staff member teaching during the fall semester will have the discretion to require all students to wear a mask in their classroom or lab if they so choose, but like faculty, they must notify students of this requirement in advance. It is also recommended to obtain a supply of masks to distribute to students who may not have one.
- Faculty or staff meeting with students or colleagues in private offices or small conference rooms may ask the attendees to wear a mask, but should notify the attendees in advance.

**Idea/Rationale:** For those who can’t or won't get vaccinated there should be accommodations made so they can attend meetings, etc. remotely. They should also be REQUIRED to wear a mask while indoors. As new Covid-19 variants emerge having a vaccination or wearing a mask are our best weapons against the virus. It should be more apparent who has or who has not gotten a vaccination. This is a pandemic. Thank you.

**Response:** The content of this web submission was addressed in the email sent by Jeff Legro, David Hale, and Shannon Sinclair on August 9, 2021.

**Idea/Rationale:** Dear USAC, In the face of the increasing spread of the Covid Delta variant, (Los Angeles reinstating its masking mandates, 70% increase in cases nationally over the last few weeks-granted predominantly among the unvaccinated, "breakthrough" cases among the vaccinated being reported at the White House, positive test results amongst the Olympic athletes arriving in Japan for the Olympics) I have concerns about UR’s vaccination and masking policy and return to normal operations for the fall semester. This is a cynical view, but in my mind, no mask does not equal fully vaccinated, and it certainly doesn't account for all the potential exposures through interactions in public places. I've been vaccinated for almost three months now, but as much as I hate wearing a
mask, I still do when going anywhere there are people I don't know personally -- which is just about everywhere outside of my home. Given that we cannot ask if a person is vaccinated and the University has indicated that it won't "require" a vaccination until one is fully approved by the FDA, how do we ensure that people not yet fully vaccinated are indeed wearing a mask in those in- and outdoor settings where physical distancing cannot be maintained? (https://www.richmond.edu/coronavirus/fall-2021/health-safety.html, "Masks on Campus") Also, Boatwright Library is in the process of restoring all its furnishings to pre-Covid arrangements (ie, no social distancing). One or more basement floors of the library will be closed due to renovations. This will increase the density of people on the floors that are open. Given that "during the fall semester, faculty will have the discretion to require all students to wear a mask in their classroom or lab," does the Head Librarian have the ability to mandate masking of all persons entering BML for the safety of the patrons and staff who are required to be on site regardless of whether or not the work they do is public-facing? Although I've been vaccinated for almost three months now, I do not wish to come down with a breakthrough case of "Covid-flu" and the possibility of being a Covid "long-hauler." My personal circumstances are such that I do not have a support network in the event of illness.

Response: This web sub was sent to Counsel and will be discussed during closed session. Please note that a web submission asking some similar questions (i.e., can staff mandate masking in their building/area) was also addressed by Shannon Sinclair earlier this month.

Idea/Rationale: STOP! In response to emails being sent out to employees, since when has UR succumbed to such bullying and bullish behavior? Stop vaccine shaming! I am dismayed that UR has fallen prey to the ?Must get the Vaccine OR Else? requirement. In the 7/22/21 email from Dave Hale/Jeffrey Legro, it is stated ?While the Delta variant has caused a rise in COVID-19 cases across the country, public health authorities have described this latest wave as a ?pandemic of the unvaccinated? and report that virtually all COVID-related hospitalizations and deaths are now among people who are not fully vaccinated and that the current vaccines provide protection against the Delta variant.? But that is not accurate anymore. There is now an increasing number of cases among those who HAVE been vaccinated?just ask the Texas ?politicians? who fled their state. They were all fully vaccinated, yet tested positive; the athletes in the Olympics were REQUIRED to get the vaccine, yet they are also testing positive; ask the increasing number of border patrol agents that are testing positive if they are vaccinated or not. In a recent study in Singapore, it?s reported that of new positive cases, 75% (YES, 75%) were fully vaccinated! To the employee that said ?The "strong personal convictions" exception, allowed only for the COVID-19 vaccine, makes no sense, breaks from current policy, and only seems to pander to a politically driven conspiracy theory?? How about you worry about what is best for you and I?ll worry about what is best for me? I have gone 17 months without catching COVID. I guess I?m one of the lucky ones- I know of only 1 person who has had it. I have not stopped living my life. Maybe I am asymptomatic?maybe I have a natural immunity against COVID?maybe I?m just a healthy individual?or maybe I can read, do my research & can decide what is best for me. But it isn?t up to YOU to tell me or others what is best for them?you don?t know any of the reasons why someone chooses not to get the vaccine. To the vaccinated?If you are 100% vaccinated, what are you worried about? It?s not the unvaccinated you should fear?it?s the variants out there that you are not protected against. Are you OK to keep getting boosters when another variant comes around? Are you going to keep putting vaccines in your body that have been rushed thru & are STILL in an ?emergency use? category? If you are?good for you.
Drugs are tested for 10 years before the FDA approves them and yet we are going to be required to get a vaccine that was pushed thru before it was ready? Hmm, OK. To the University?how come you don?t ask for medical records to make sure we?ve had other vaccines? What about the flu shot that is only effective 40% of the time because it mutates every year? Why is that not mandated or required? Rhetorical questions, because I know what your answer would be. Because COVID vaccines are still not approved, if anything happens, drug companies cannot be held liable. If you start requiring the vaccine (when approved), are you willing to take the chance of being held liable if something happens to your employee? Where does it end? Or is this how it?s going to be when you ?pander? (to use the word of previous employee) to those who have the biggest mouth? Please do NOT make the mistake of thinking those employees speak for all of us. There is a larger number than you think on campus who are not in that camp. So take this back to your ?closed session meeting? and know that there is more than one voice on campus. I just ask that you listen to US.

**Response:** This web submission was sent to administration and discussed in closed session. No clear question or suggestion was present, and because the web submission was sent anonymously, USAC was unable to reach out for clarification. Those who are strongly against getting vaccinated can apply for an exemption as has been previously outlined in multiple communications from University administration.

All web submissions should include clear questions that you have not been able to get answered to your satisfaction or are uncomfortable asking through other avenues, e.g. speaking to your supervisor or HR representative. When submitting a web submission, please remember that your contact information will not be shared with the full council or anyone the web submission is shared with: this information is only used so the Vice Chair can reach out with a response, request for clarification, or other follow-up. Staff who wish to voice strong opinions can speak to their USAC representatives directly. Future web submissions without clear questions may not be published, although they will be presented during closed session.

For those interested in further information about the Singapore and Olympics information shared above, you can find more information on COVID-19 numbers in Singapore in this [news article](#) and in the Olympics in this [news article](#).

**Idea/Rationale:** What is the University doing to address the rising concern of the Delta variant? Is going back to work the safest choice for employees based on recent data and evidence? The data is clear--the Delta variant is more contagious and more severe. Why has there been no communication from the University on this rising threat? I am worried about going back to in-person with people I know for a fact are unvaccinated. What is the University doing to address this?

**Response:** Submitted to Counsel on August 2, 2021. This web submission will be discussed during closed session.

**Idea/Rationale:** It seems like a lot of offices are picking and choosing whether to be in office by the August 2nd deadline date. Others are being told they "absolutely need" to be in office regardless if their position actually requires a lot of "in-office" tasks or not. Some of these people are
immunocompromised but have been denied work-from-home opportunities. HR and higher-ups have been slow on the process of approving flexplace applications. I understand that there are lots of moving parts but this is ridiculous. With over 3000 students coming back from multiple locations, wouldn't you think that this is a priority situation? Especially with the rise of the Delta variant, I think those that are requesting a flexplace should be prioritized for the health and safety of our campus community. Is there anything we can do to expedite this process? The rise of the Delta variant is a serious risk for those inside our campus community. Because the University is such a bubble, the risk of a strain of COVID multiplying is very high. I don't understand why the University doesn't prioritize the health of their employees who need flexplace accommodations. It seems like this is being taken as a joke or being thrown to the side but WE ARE STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC.

Response: This web submission was sent to HR on August 9, 2021 and will be updated when a response is received.

Idea/Rationale: Would it be possible to continue using zoom for USAC meetings now that we're all back in-person? I, and many people I know, were unable to attend the meetings when they were held in person, but have been able to take part in them remotely. I know I wouldn't be able to leave my post in the office to attend if they go back to in-person, but I would join if given the zoom option. Attending the meetings helps me feel more connected to the University and I've appreciated the opportunity to join the meetings during COVID.

Response: Thank you for your input. This web submission will be included in our discussion(s) concerning the possibility of moving USAC meetings back to in-person. Any other University staff who hold strong opinions on this topic should feel free to contact their USAC representative or submit a similar web submission on the topic.

Idea/Rationale: Will the UR COVID-19 Dashboard or another University resource provide updates to faculty and staff regarding the percentage of students, faculty and staff who have (1) reported being fully vaccinated; (2) been approved for an exemption; (3) not responded to the request made in the University Communication on 6/24/2021? It seems important since the goal of having a high percentage of students, faculty and staff fully vaccinated as a foundational element for the 2021-2022 academic year was communicated to the UR community on 6/24/2021.

Response: This web submission was submitted to HR on July 9, 2021, and we received the following updated response through Carl Sorensen on August 10, 2021. USAC previously voiced their support for this information to be shared in the interest of transparency and building trust within the wider UR community.

The July 22nd announcement to the community (“Vaccination Data and Information about Returning to Work on Campus”) provided our first report on UR community vaccination rates. Updated vaccination data was shared with the
community on August 9th. We will include information on the percentage of students and employees who are vaccinated on the dashboard. We expect to continue to provide updated vaccination rate information through the beginning of the fall semester.