

To the University Community:

Last week, we shared UConn's plans for in-person commencement ceremonies at Rentschler Field honoring the Classes of 2020 and 2021, in addition to our online ceremony. These occasions will cap the end of a long and tumultuous academic year with a spirit of pride, togetherness, and celebration – and serve as one sign of our gradual return to normalcy.

In that same spirit, we write to you today about a new beginning: returning to our campuses for the fall 2021 semester.

Though there are of course unknowns and uncertainties that remain, there are signs that we are beginning to emerge from this pandemic. Given the accelerating pace of vaccinations, widening eligibility, and positive trends with respect to prevalence and infection, this spring and summer will be a crucial time to hopefully turn the tide for good when it comes to COVID. We encourage every member of our community to make an appointment to be vaccinated as soon as you are eligible.

Knowing this, the University is actively planning scenarios for a fall reopening. As with everything related to the pandemic, how this will actually unfold will be based on public health guidance and circumstances at the time the fall semester is set to begin, meaning that we must remain as nimble and vigilant as we have been for the last year.

We share our plans and goals below.

ACADEMICS

Students were able to begin registration for fall and summer classes yesterday, March 22.

Similar to last year, nearly all courses for the summer will be offered online.

For the fall, we are hopeful that we will be able to more fully return to an in-person student experience. To that end, students registering will see that the majority of courses are listed as in-person, close to the same levels as fall 2019:

- 93% of undergraduate classes are listed as in-person, compared with 98% in fall 2019
- 86% of graduate classes are listed as in-person, compared with 90% in fall 2019

While we have entered the registration process with the goal of offering a more fully in-person academic experience next year than was possible this year, we will be flexible moving forward to support evolving academic needs in our schools and colleges. Moreover, we will be closely monitoring guidance on social distancing, vaccination rates, and other public health indicators over the next few months that could affect these levels of in-person experiences. If any of these indicators result in significant changes to our expected levels of in-person academics, we will share that update as soon as possible.

Throughout this year, the University has implemented a variety of health and safety measures with respect to issues such as distancing and airflow in classrooms, offices, and other facilities, and we will continue to adjust those measures as we prepare for a larger and denser population returning to our campuses.

STUDENT LIFE

Our fall plans are always contingent on guidance from the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH). Given the increasing prevalence of vaccine in the world, it is likely that all students will have the opportunity to be vaccinated before returning to campuses in the fall, and all are strongly encouraged to do so. UConn will plan to offer vaccinations to any returning students who have not been vaccinated, with a priority on residential students. Regional students will be advised to obtain the vaccine through their medical provider over the course of the summer.

All students will be asked to notify the University over the course of the summer when they have received the vaccine. While receiving the vaccine is not mandatory at this time, we cannot emphasize enough how much being vaccinated matters and informs the University's ability to successfully reopen. Please follow your state and national guidelines for vaccination and take advantage of appointments when they arise. In the United States, the CDC has suggested all individuals over 16 years of age should have access to an appointment by May.

The University currently plans for our residence halls to return to higher density – as high as approximately 90% -- depending on public health circumstances at the beginning of the fall semester. The residential community will continue to plan for holding some bed space for quarantine and isolation should COVID-19 remain present at UConn. That number will be determined over the course of the summer following DPH guidance. Student Affairs will send more information to students on residential capacity on March 31.

Masking and many distancing requirements will remain in place in the fall and will follow state and federal guidance. The University will adapt its current [color-coded system](#) to reflect the ability to relax some restrictions as vaccination rates increase and guidance allows. The color-coded system will affect the capacity of facilities such as the Recreation Center and the Student Union, student activities, dining, and residential life.

STAFF WORKFORCE

While employees who are vital to maintaining physical campus operations and conducting research have been working in person consistently for the duration of the pandemic, along with faculty and graduate students who taught in-person courses, many of our valued staff have been working remotely.

Those who are working remotely should plan on doing so through approximately Aug. 15. This does not mean that all employees who are working remotely will be required to come to campus on that date. Some employees who will play a needed role in preparing our campuses for the return of students and the beginning of the fall semester may be asked to report to work over the

summer in advance of move-in and the start of the academic year. An employee who needs to come to campus at any time may do so with the agreement of their manager and Human Resources.

As has been the case since the beginning of the pandemic, many employees who could do so have appreciated the ability to work remotely over the course of the last year and are just as productive working from home – or more so – than when working in an office environment full-time. Others much prefer an office environment and are more productive there. For many employees and managers, a hybrid approach between the two, when possible, would be ideal, provided the University's business needs are being met.

Given this, the University is in the process of examining new policies and approaches that may allow for greater flexibility for managers and employees when it comes to remote working in the future – beginning this fall – while ensuring that fair, equitable and consistent criteria can be implemented across the University, balanced with University needs. More on that in the coming weeks.

A new approach to remote working is only one example of changes we are considering.

GOING FORWARD

As noted above, there are clearly lessons to be learned from our experience during the pandemic with respect to learning, working, and the long-term effects for individuals and society.

In some cases, those lessons present challenges we will need to address, and in others, they can present opportunities to change and innovate. To that end, the University has convened two committees to think about and plan for potential short-term and long-term impacts in our daily operations: [the Future of Learning committee](#) and the [Future of Work committee](#).

Over the coming weeks and months, these groups will meet to discuss and recommend any number of changes and new approaches the University may adopt as we work to address problems and evolve for the better based on our experience during the pandemic. The Provost will provide additional information and details on both of these efforts this week, as well as through the coming months.

We have also seen the pandemic exacerbate inequities and evoke discrimination that disproportionately affects many in our community, from higher rates of COVID infection and serious illness among people of color and other populations, to heightened violence against Asians and Asian Americans, to increased caregiving demands. Our University can play many roles in addressing these concerns, both locally in supporting the needs of our own community, and broadly in applying our scholarly expertise to better understand and improve these issues at a societal level.

RE-ENTRY PLAN

The University will present its formal fall 2021 re-entry plan during the week of May 24, which will include similarly detailed plans as were adopted prior to the start of the past two academic semesters. We expect these plans will be updated throughout the summer based on circumstances.

With respect to vaccinations, please note that because each of the three vaccines have to date been approved on an emergency basis only, the University is not able to require that anyone – student or employee – receive it. Please also recall that UConn does not have its own vaccination plan; we are implementing the vaccination plan created by the state Department of Public Health, which determines prioritization and timetables. UConn cannot create its own system of prioritization. The state has announced that it expects that all people over the age of 16 will be eligible to receive the vaccine as of April 5 in Connecticut.

So there is still much work to do, but we believe we have good cause to be hopeful about our future. It is with a growing sense of relief, optimism and confidence that we look to our return.

Sincerely,

Tom Katsouleas
President

Carl Lejuez
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Scott Jordan
Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President for Administration