

CRC Meeting with President Morehead and Task Force Leaders

29 April 2021

Executive Summary

Overall

President Morehead: "I would urge everyone, to the extent possible, to get vaccinated, and to talk to their health care provider about how they can be vaccinated [even when considering] medical conditions that they may have. I think we all agree on this point: getting our folks vaccinated is really important."

President Morehead: "As soon as we receive information from the University System [related to COVID], we will be providing that information to the campus community immediately, without delay."

Vaccinations

- Recent update from the University Health Center (UHC) on availability of vaccine and expanding eligibility of vaccine to those with affiliations to UGA or USG:
 - <https://coronavirus.uga.edu/2021/05/06/expanding-uhcs-outreach-for-covid-19-vaccinations/>
- If there is one message to convey, it's the importance of being vaccinated, not only for the individual, but for the public as a whole.
- As of May 2, UHC had administered more than 19,000 vaccinations with more than 9,900 people fully vaccinated.
- No decision to mandate the vaccine from USG as of now. When a decision is made, it will apply to all USG institutions.
- Per USG, UGA is not able to restore sick leave time taken to receive a vaccination prior to March 31, 2021.

Longer-Term Health Considerations related to COVID-19

- There have been no definitive guidelines given yet. HR would likely use the processes for either FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) or ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), or both to determine consideration for longer term health issues.

Safety and Preventative Measures

- USG guidelines will be followed for safety and preventative measures in the fall.
- The plan for MRR (Major Repair and Renovation) funds for this coming year is heavily weighted toward addressing HVAC issues. Final MRR plans will be approved by the Board of Regents. Once approved, anticipate a lot of work happening over the summer.
- In places where renovations are not possible, will continue with portable HEPA machines.

Instruction

- For the fall, as of now, we are planning for a return to normal, to be in the classrooms on a regular schedule with full density.

- But, at the same time, we do have three and a half months until fall. We have contingency plans.
- With the online and hybrid learning models used in the last year, we will have more than 20,000 students (first-year students, rising second-year students, transfer students, new graduate students) who have not yet seen what normal routines at UGA look like, have never really experienced UGA operating at its full speed. We will have to communicate frequently and clearly to remind them about expectations [e.g., attendance].
- For faculty, it is very important to have early communication with students and set very clear expectations for their courses, including those related to attendance.
- There is some expectation that we will still have masks inside classrooms in the fall. That could change based upon where the virus is as we get through the summer.

Mental Health

- We have a new CAPS (Counseling and Psychiatric Services) director, and one of his most important strategic directions is to create more same day accessibility. We have investigated strategies to use virtual care as part of a stepwise progression. We have also looked at our staffing model for opportunities to expand resources [<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/caps/welcome>].
- We have a very purposeful, intentional plan to ramp up all services with respect to CAPS accessibility.

Lessons Learned in 2020-2021

- No expectations of central mandates from USG that everything must be done a certain way. Perhaps more flexibility based upon some of the things we have learned.
- The Board of Regents wants UGA to end instruction that is online unless that online instruction was occurring before the pandemic. They want us to get back to being a residential campus that acts like a residential campus.
- Forming a working group of faculty to more formally investigate teaching strategies based on the successes and challenges of the pandemic teaching experience.

The meeting was convened at 3 p.m.

In Attendance

President Jere Morehead

Medical Oversight Task Force (MOTF)

- Dr. Garth Russo, Executive Director, University Health Center
- Dr. Shelley Nuss, Dean, AU/UGA Medical Partnership
- Dr. Marsha Davis, Dean, College of Public Health
- Dr. Lisa Nolan, Dean, College of Veterinary Medicine

Preventative Measures Advisory Board (PMAB) co-chairs

- Dr. Lisa Nolan, Dean, College of Veterinary Medicine
- Mr. John McCollum, Associate Vice President for Environmental Safety

Dr. Rahul Shrivastav, Vice President of Instruction

Dr. Kyle Tschepikow, Assistant to the President

COVID Response Committee

Co-Chair Janette Hill, Professor, Learning, Design, & Technology, Mary Frances Early College of Education	Co-Chair Annette Poulsen, Professor, Sterne Chair of Banking & Finance, Terry College of Business
Secretary Stuart Ivy, Senior IT Manager	Asim Ahmed, President, UGA Student Government Association (not able to attend)
Don DeMaria, Director, Washington Semester Program	Paula Krimer, Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine
Bill Lanzilotta, Associate Professor, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Franklin Arts & Sciences	Christine Scartz, Clinical Assistant Professor, School of Law
Cynthia Tope, Graduate University Representative, Graduate Student Association	Kari K Turner, Associate Professor, Animal & Dairy Science, College of Agricultural & Environmental Science
Janet Westpheling, Professor, Genetics, Franklin Arts & Sciences	Beth Woods, Executive Director for IT, Franklin Arts & Sciences

Co-Chair Janette Hill

Most of the questions we have received are looking for answers about how UGA operations will look in the Fall. We know that it is difficult to predict the impact of COVID three or four months into the future, but any early insights are extremely valuable.

We also recognize that many of these topics have been discussed previously. However, we continue to receive input from the university community asking these questions. We appreciate your patience in clarifying or extending information on these topics.

President Morehead

I want to be clear on one point: as soon as we receive information from the University System, we will be providing that information to the campus community immediately, without delay. We will not be waiting for any meeting to share important information. The system's leadership, including the Chancellor and Executive Vice-Chancellors and other critical individuals, are meeting with a group of presidents to discuss what is next. I am in that group of presidents. They are getting our individual and collective input on a variety of questions. They are waiting this week for some important information because we expect the Department of Public Health (DPH) to be announcing, along with the Governor's office, a series of modified or new rules related to the pandemic that will likely guide a lot of their ultimate decisions. As soon as the system makes its decisions, we will quickly turn that around and be informing the campus committee. [The Governor's Office released this information following our meeting: <https://gov.georgia.gov/press-releases/2021-04-30/governor-kemp-issues-new-covid-19-guidance-executive-order>.]

Co-Chair Hill

Q: Are there any updates that you can share with us about the work of the Task Force that you are on with other USG presidents?

President Morehead

The Task Force is advising the Chancellor and the Board of Regents. It would be inappropriate, and incomplete, for me to say too much because I really do not know how all these things will play out. As of now, there is unanimity around the notion that we need to keep doing for summer semester classes what we have been doing in the spring. I do not anticipate that there would be any significant changes for Maymester or summer terms.

Co-Chair Annette Poulsen

President Morehead, thank you for the update.

Dr. Russo, thank you for an unbelievable year that you have given to the University of Georgia. We know that you are retiring this summer; thank you for your service and commitment to everyone in the university community.

Q: Could you give us an update on the vaccination process? Are you seeing good participation by the university community?

Dr. Russo

If there is one message I would convey, it's the importance of being vaccinated, not only for the individual, but for the public as a whole. Overall, we are doing very well. We have passed the inflection point in vaccine status in terms of supply versus demand.

We currently have good inventory of all three vaccines. In rough numbers, we have given about 18,000 vaccines coming into the week [end of April]; about 11,000-12,000 of those were discrete individuals. About 8000-8500 people have been fully vaccinated. By the end of this week, the gap between total vaccinations and those fully vaccinated will narrow significantly [For the most up-to-date information, see the UGA COVID dashboard <https://www.uhs.uga.edu/healthtopics/covid-19-health-and-exposure-updates>].

Co-Chair Hill

Thank you, Dr. Russo. The Archnews update that came out earlier this week on vaccinations and other information was very useful [<https://coronavirus.uga.edu/2021/04/28/covid-19-vaccine-update-2/>].

Q: We have seen that some public universities are requiring COVID vaccinations to return to campus in the Fall. Are there any updates about whether USG might make COVID vaccinations mandatory for students (or all) in the university community?

President Morehead

I have not heard of any decision to mandate the vaccine. I'd be really surprised if there were a mandate imposed by USG, particularly when the vaccine is still in its status as an emergency use authorization. But whatever USG says, it will apply to all USG institutions. It will be a USG decision, not a UGA decision.

Q: If booster shots were to become necessary, would UGA be able to provide those boosters as a part of its closed Point of Distribution (POD) agreement?

Dr. Russo

Absolutely. Relatedly, we have pretty much fulfilled our obligation for our initial population. We have had conversations with the DPH and USG about having latitude to expand or relax some of the some of the initial definitions of who is eligible for services through us. And the answer to that is yes. We are working through what populations would we be in the best position to serve, looking for those who have a connection to the university or the system [This link provides information about the expanded eligibility: <https://coronavirus.uga.edu/2021/05/06/expanding-uhcs-outreach-for-covid-19-vaccinations/>].

Q: Staff have noted appreciation for the generous leave allowances for vaccinations received after March 31, but could sick leave taken for vaccinations before March 31 be restored?

President Morehead

USG is quite clear that we cannot do that. They view what they are doing now as creating an incentive to encourage people to get vaccinated. They are not willing to go back and change records. For people that got out there early, we provided accommodations on campus that USG approved.

Co-Chair Poulsen

Thank you for the communication that you're providing from UGA experts about COVID and the importance of being vaccinated. We had two questions related to communication.

Q: Will you continue to provide data on the COVID dashboard into next Fall (and beyond if necessary)?

Dr. Russo

Absolutely. We will keep posting data to the dashboard.

Q: Information about the number of people vaccinated on campus (whether or not through UHC) would be valuable. Have you surveyed the community? If yes, will this information be shared?

President Morehead

The system has asked us not to do any surveillance questions on our own. However, they are working on some, and I know that they are going to be doing something with students next week [early May]. The Chancellor has said that the purpose of collecting the information is to figure out where DPH needs to send vaccines over the summer. If they think a lot of unvaccinated students are going to be in the metropolitan Atlanta area, or Albany or Brunswick, then that may drive more vaccines going there.

Co-Chair Hill

Q: Has there been any discussion about doing data collection at the system level for faculty and staff?

President Morehead

I have not heard that yet. They assume faculty and staff live in broader communities and stay in those communities over the summer. Thus, there is less need to consider where faculty and staff are over the summer.

Dr. Russo

Relatedly, we have offered to be supportive of student needs from other institutions if they return to Athens for the summer. I think that's part of what they are trying to figure out: where the students will be so they can get their first or second shots. If there is a way to help facilitate that, they are willing to do it.

President Morehead

Another area where we really want to concentrate this summer is on our incoming first-year students. We're working on strategies to address that population as they come in for summer orientation. I hope a lot of them have already received the vaccine, but to the extent that they have not, and they are willing, then we want to make that as easy as possible.

Dr. Russo

There are some logistical issues with determining how many vaccines would be needed for incoming students. There is a complexity if they are not yet 18. Right now, we are thinking about the issues of not knowing how

many vaccinations would be needed, providing counselors for vaccine options, and facilitating access into the health center.

VP Shrivastav

Our orientation is different this year because of social distancing guidelines and limited capacity. There is a virtual component that is mandatory and an in-person component that is optional. Thus, not every student may be here physically during orientation.

President Morehead

We will be very intentional with our students to educate them on their options for getting the vaccine over the summer or when they arrive in the fall. We are definitely going to be communicating with students whether they come here or not about those options.

Co-Chair Hill

Thank you. Our next set of questions have to do with longer run health considerations.

Q: Some have estimated as many as 10% of those who have tested positive for COVID-19 will have “long-haul” symptoms. For these individuals, how will HR work with staff and faculty to determine appropriate strategies for optimal performance? What strategies will DRC use to facilitate the return of these students to the classroom with appropriate accommodations?

President Morehead

There have been no definitive guidelines yet, but I believe HR would likely use the processes for either FMLA or ADA, or both. With respect to students, USG will guide us on this as those discussions proceed. We may have more information about that in the coming weeks.

Q: What options will DRC provide for students who are unable to be vaccinated whether for health or religious reasons? How will HR work with staff and faculty who are unable to be vaccinated for health or religious reasons?

President Morehead

I do not know whether there would be any accommodation based solely on whether you were vaccinated or not vaccinated. But again, I would expect we would receive more information on that topic in the coming weeks.

I urge everyone to the extent possible to get vaccinated, and to talk to their health care provider about how they can be vaccinated regardless of medical conditions that they may have. I think we all agree on this point: getting our folks vaccinated is really important.

Co-Chair Poulsen

Q: Are there updates on upgrading air circulation and ventilation systems, something we talked about previously?

President Morehead

I just got the first look at plans for MRR (Major Repair and Renovation) funds for this coming year. It is heavily weighted toward HVAC and addressing HVAC issues. The plan hasn't been finalized, and we have to get the plan approved by the Board of Regents. There are some places where we cannot fix HVAC completely until we redo the building (e.g., they may have window units in the building). In those places, we are going to have to continue with our portable HEPA machines. In other places, I was told that we already are in great shape. As soon as the Board approves what FMD is proposing, projects will be ongoing. You will see a lot of progress made in that area.

Co-Chair Hill

Thank you. We also had some questions in our survey come up around instruction.

Q: Recognizing that fall is still three and a half months away, any insights that you could give us in terms of new details on fall semester.

VP Shrivastav

For the fall, as of now, we are planning for a return to normal, to be in the classrooms on a regular schedule with full density. You may remember, we decided to permanently alter our class period time with 20-minute breaks between class periods. That is a positive change for everybody.

But, at the same time, we do have three and a half months until fall. As you can see what has happened in India or Brazil, things can change quickly. So, we do have contingency plans. But as of now, the expectation is that we will return to normal in the fall.

Q: Students have become used to distance learning and having that flexibility. How might we deal with low class attendance.

VP Shrivastav

Yes, I think that is a potential problem. We will have more than 8,500 (*5600 summer/fall + 200 spring + 2800 transfer*) first-year and transfer students, who started last year and have not yet seen what normal routines at UGA look like. We will have another class (first-year and transfer students) coming in who went through a year of high school which may have been mostly or partly virtual. With new graduate students in the count, we will have more than 20,000 students who never really experienced UGA operating at its full speed. We must communicate frequently and clearly to remind them about expectations, and ensure we have the necessary support wherever that may be needed.

For faculty, it is very important to have early communication with students and set clear expectations especially with regards to attendance. And then consistency in applying those expectations. If we maintain those three things uniformly, things should go well. If any of those is disrupted, then we may run into problems. We will begin communication with students early in the summer regarding these expectations. We will also communicate the same concepts with faculty later in the summer. We all must be prepared to run into

challenges with students, faculty, and staff. We need to relearn some of these things collectively to go back to a different normal.

President Morehead

We are planning centrally to fund a number of initiatives for what will be the rising second-year class to give them some experiences that they may have missed because of the pandemic to try to build some community and relationship with the institution. We have heard a lot about students feeling isolated and not really connected to UGA. The Vice President for Student Affairs as well as Dr. Shrivastav are going to have a series of events to build those connections with the institution.

Co-Chair Hill

Thank you.

Q: We implemented the six-foot distancing in the classroom this past year. Now there is evidence about the impact of overall density in the room and the duration of exposure. Do we have an indication if that is with or without masks being required when at full density?

President Morehead

Again, we don't have definitive information at this point from the system. My expectation is that we will still have masks inside classrooms. But if we knew how many COVID cases would be active in Georgia on August 1, I would feel more comfortable answering that question. We had a major drop off this week on our COVID numbers on campus (perhaps a statistical blip). I don't know whether that reflects fewer students going to surveillance testing, or if it's a reflection of fewer students having COVID [Recent report on low number of COVID cases: <https://news.uga.edu/covid-numbers-5-5/>].

Co-Chair Hill

Another big area that continues to come up is mental health concerns.

Q: Are there any plans for extending CAPS resources so that services can be obtained more quickly? Some students have told us that they are waiting up to four weeks for an appointment with CAPS. For some students, the financial burden of going out into the community is more than they can do.

Dr. Russo

We have a new CAPS director, and one of his most important strategic directions is to create more same day accessibility. We have investigated strategies to use virtual care as part of a stepwise progression. We have also looked at our staffing model for opportunities to expand resources.

We have a very purposeful, intentional plan to ramp up all services and I see a new model emerging with respect to CAPS accessibility. The virtual services have been a game changer; there is immediacy and there are no barriers to access other than technology (to which most of the students have access).

Co-Chair Poulsen

Q: Our last general area refers to how can we take what we have learned from the last 14 months to make the University a better place in terms of research opportunities, teaching pedagogy, and flexibility in work opportunities?

President Morehead

Those issues are evolving. I do not see any central mandates coming from USG that everything must be done a certain way except that the Board of Regents wants us to end instruction that is online unless that online instruction was occurring before the pandemic. They want us to get back to being a residential campus that acts like a residential campus. However, I would guess that there will be more flexibility based upon some things we have learned.

We are a campus of 40,000 students, and we exist to serve those students. We'll see more and more people returning to their normal work routines over the course of the summer. I am sure there will be some special circumstances based upon the lessons learned. In terms of supporting new pedagogy, I would be open to any grant proposals that come to the President's office. I know I can pick up the phone and get support for new teaching initiatives because we have a lot of alumni that care about that issue.

VP Shrivastav

We spend a lot of time on this issue and in February, I sent a campus-wide note on exactly the same issue (<https://ovpi.uga.edu/news/adapt-evolve-or-transform/>). We are also looking at what is happening nationally. There are a lot of futurists out there claiming that the world has changed, and universities will never be the same again. Personally, I think that we must be very deliberate in determining what works well and does not work well. We haven't really captured what corners were cut and what is the long-term impact of that. We are collecting information on this now.

We have begun some pilot programs where things have worked well. For example, advising on zoom has been very successful. Now, we have taken a small number of academic advisors and allowed academic advising via zoom later in the evening from 5pm to 8pm. We will evaluate its success over the next few months.

I've talked with the Provost about getting a working group of faculty together to more formally investigate teaching strategies based on the successes of the pandemic teaching experience. Also, what are the potential challenges? I do think we need to be cautious and deliberate in moving forward rather than making a knee jerk reaction and saying, "Okay, this worked last semester; therefore, let's adopt it wholesale."

Co-Chair Hill

Thank you again for everything that you have done this year. Your commitment and your tireless work for the institution and the larger UGA community is not only laudable, it's amazing.

President Morehead

Thank you. Thanks to everyone who served on this committee this year.