



June 21, 2021

Edmund Manydeeds III,
President of the Board of Regents
University of Wisconsin System
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Dear Regent President Manydeeds and the UW Board of Regents,

We are members of [United Faculty and Academic Staff](#) (UFAS), American Federation of Teachers Local 223, AFL-CIO. UFAS is a democratically organized labor union that has advocated for faculty and academic staff at UW–Madison since the union was established in 1930.

We are writing to you out of concern for the well-being and health of our students, staff, faculty, and wider communities. University of Wisconsin System schools are members of the [American Colleges Health Association \(ACHA\)](#), and we urge that the UW System policies be aligned with the ACHA [“Considerations for Reopening Institutions of Higher Education for the Fall Semester 2021”](#), posted on May 25, 2021. These guidelines recommend COVID-19 vaccine requirements, a policy that [hundreds of campuses](#) across the nation are implementing to protect their communities: “where state law and available resources allow, ACHA recommends COVID-19 vaccination requirements for all on-campus college and university students for fall semester 2021, in accordance with the IHE's normal exemption practices, including exemptions for medical contraindications. This recommendation applies to all students who live on campus and/or participate in on campus classes, studies, research, or activities” ([ACHA guidelines](#), p. 1).

We urge the UW Board of Regents to mandate COVID-19 vaccines for UW System schools, with exceptions as outlined in the ACHA guidelines. We contend that the extenuating nature of this pandemic warrants requiring vaccines: over 600,000 people have lost their lives in the US alone, and others are experiencing long-lasting symptoms from COVID-19. In a span of 15 months, the pandemic has led to more deaths than US troop losses in World War I, World War II, or the Vietnam War.

Further, we are alarmed that the current plans for Fall 2021 appear to be in contradiction to ACHA guidelines for campuses without vaccine mandates. These include a return to full in-person large lectures negating the possibility of physical distancing. The ACHA guidelines caution: “If a COVID-19 vaccine requirement is not implemented, it will be extremely important for IHEs to remain at heightened alert with their current oversight of population based strategies to mitigate and contain the spread of COVID-19. Physical distancing, masking, control of group sizes, appropriate ventilation, advanced testing strategies, and rapid contact tracing would likely need to be continued” (ACHA guideline, p. 2). The [CDC updated guidelines for Institutes of Higher Education](#) and [the US Department of Education](#) similarly emphasize the importance of prevention strategies that reduce spread where there is a mixed population of people who are fully vaccinated and those who are not fully vaccinated (both published in June 2021).

We all remember that Fall 2020 was one of the times of greatest crisis and chaos in the history of UW System, and UW–Madison especially, and we urge the Board to learn from the success of Spring 2021 and maintain the policies that helped students, staff, faculty, and the community make progress on getting the pandemic under control.

The ACHA urges relying on knowledge and behaviors from the last academic year to protect the campus and wider community: “Communicating and reinforcing behavioral interventions will be particularly important as students arrive in the fall. New students may be unaware of the campus culture, rules, and procedures for COVID-19 containment, and they may be less likely to have previously been infected and therefore lack immunity. Fraternity and sorority rush; welcome events; the arrival of incoming students, including international students; bar patronage; congregate living, and various other group events may precipitate outbreaks when participants are not fully vaccinated” ([ACHA guidelines](#), p. 2).

The guidelines further note that campuses should “develop plans for alternative or flexible work assignments for high-risk staff” ([ACHA guidelines](#), p. 23). We call on the UW System to develop and communicate clearly the processes for workers to adjust duties and guidelines for their health and safety and that of the campus and wider community as a whole.

Since the plans currently in place at various UW System campuses do not allow for compliance with the ACHA recommendations for a non-fully vaccinated environment, we request that the Board considers this matter at its July meeting and mandates that UW–Madison and other UW System schools, as members of the ACHA, align their plans with the ACHA’s recommendations in order to promote the health and well-being of our campuses and wider communities when our students return for the Fall 2021 semester from around the state, country, and world. We ask to be informed about this discussion and decisions made regarding the ACHA recommendations. We can be reached at ufas223@gmail.com.

Thank you,

Members, United Faculty and Academic Staff, AFT Local #223, UW–Madison