Dear Dr. Stillerman:

Thank you for sharing the concerns that you and your colleagues have expressed regarding the health and safety policies we have implemented for this academic year. President Mantella and I share your concerns and have mounted the Virus Action Team, extensive preventative measures, new policies, testing, and exhaustive supports, all in service of keeping you and our community safe. As you correctly point out, there are multiple variables and various constituencies to consider when making decisions on behalf of our entire community. I'm pleased you recognize this and welcome the support you expressed for many of our actions, including the face covering requirement and the necessity of a vaccination mandate.

Regarding the specifics of our mandate and the process used to reach our decision, the University Academic Senate (UAS) recommendation did not call for "a vaccination requirement to be enforced as from September 1st", as you represent. The actual recommendation was: *GVSU mandates that faculty, staff, and students (with appropriate medical and religious waivers) will be vaccinated or begin a course of vaccination against COVID-19 by September 1 and complete the course of vaccination by September 30.*

The administration's initial health and safety proposal was shared with UAS and I am pleased that insights from the discussion with UAS aligned with university policy. We also discussed the approach with leadership from the Student Senate, and advised/consulted with formally recognized bargaining and employee groups on campus. Shared governance provides for meaningful faculty voice and involvement in administrative decisions; shared governance does not mean automatic adoption of all requests. Furthermore, upon receipt of the UAS' recommendation on August 5, a response was promptly submitted to UAS by President Mantella and me; UAS was not left without explanation as you suggest. It is our practice to post responses to UAS proffered recommendations on the faculty governance website. A copy of that response is attached.

As you are aware, we did not define September 1 as an initial deadline to begin a course of vaccination. Indeed, throughout the summer we communicated with faculty, staff, and students, urging them to be inoculated before arriving on campus. Rather, we decided that the most effective way to reach the status where all are either vaccinated or have an exemption was to have a September 30 deadline. This affords us time to marshal administrative and faculty resources, to use positive reinforcement in addressing the concerns of the campus community, and to ensure that student and employee rights, including the rights of tenured faculty, are properly understood and respected.

You have inquired about the process that will be used for those who do not come into compliance. The focus for now is on education, accessibility of vaccinations on campus, and of the importance of compliance. We value all members of our community – faculty, staff and students – and want to do everything we can to bring them in compliance and retain them as part of our community.

We also appreciate that for some the mandate is difficult. This includes a number of tenured faculty who are among those struggling with the decision to be vaccinated. We value them, and don't anticipate diminishing their worth to us by unceremoniously separating them from the university in an arbitrary or hasty fashion. As a student-centered university and a community that prides itself on care for others, it is important that we treat students and staff with the respect they deserve during this process as well. We will deploy multiple approaches to drive compliance consistent with terms of employment for employees and our student judicial code for students. This measured approach is fair to all and consistent with who we are as a community.

We remain confident that all of our methods, taken together, will safeguard the health and safety of our campus community while treating our colleagues and students with the utmost respect. We have and will continue to work closely with UAS in the true spirit of shared governance, particularly in these times of great challenge for any community.

Best regards,

Chris Plouff, EdD

Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic & Student Affairs