

Preparing for a Safe, Respectful, and Inclusive Return to Onsite Work

Reports regarding vaccine distribution and effectiveness are indeed welcome news. It seems likely that the Oregon State community will be able to return to some level of in-person work in the fall. We look forward to the time when we can be together again, engaging with our students in actual classrooms, interacting daily with our colleagues, resuming research that has been disrupted, and working with the public in our outreach and extension activities.

But much remains unknown. Do the vaccines confer long-term immunity? Do they prevent transmission of the virus or merely lessen its severity? Are they effective against the new variants of COVID-19 that are emerging? We are eager to learn the answers to these important questions because we all look forward to a time when we can put the anxieties and disruptions of COVID-19 behind us and reunite with our students and colleagues at our work sites. However, until such time as we have definitive answers to these questions, we urge the administration to proceed with caution as they develop plans to resume in-person work.

As we move forward, it is vital that we remember this past year has been a time of great hardship for the university community. Family members, friends, and colleagues have been lost to the virus. Many who survived face long-term health consequences. Grief, stress, and isolation have impacted everyone's mental health. Any demand that we return to campus without taking these facts into consideration would be heartless and not in keeping with our values. None of us has perfect insight into the ways that this pandemic has impacted others, and we must treat one another with compassion, flexibility, and humility.

We want to remind you that reopening plans must respect the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) as negotiated with the administration. According to OSU's [COVID planning website](#), we are currently in Operations Level 3. At this time, Benton County on the whole is considered "extremely high risk." Until we achieve Operations Level 1, no faculty member whose work can be performed remotely may be forced to return to in-person work. If you are being pressured to return to onsite work without acknowledgement of these restrictions and uncertain conditions, please let your union know by contacting a member of [the Representative Assembly](#) or emailing us at info@uaosu.org.

When we left campus, faculty suddenly had to make space in their homes for offices and to work out the details of meeting OSU's mission online. Now that we hope to transition back to campus, the onus is on the administration to not only provide a safe and ready workspace, but to also consider individual circumstances. Individual faculty members and members of their families may have health issues or concerns that prevent a return to campus while the virus continues to circulate. Others may have caregiving responsibilities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and make returning to in-person work difficult or even impossible.

University administration must commit to ensuring that everyone's rights are protected in the campus reopening process. There must be procedures in place that allow faculty members to obtain exemptions through a process that is neither intrusive nor onerous. No one's livelihood or benefits should be forfeited if they are unable to fully comply with university plans. We will

continue to work with the administration to ensure that faculty are protected during this period of transition, including seeking to re-enter negotiations if needed.

We sincerely hope we will be able to fully reopen in the fall, but we must ensure that the path forward is safe, respectful, and inclusive.

In solidarity,

Kathleen Stanley
UAOSU President