Resolution To Extend Face Covering Requirements

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Whereas, the Covid-19 pandemic is spread mainly by respiratory droplets transferred from person to person;

Whereas, the University of Arkansas implemented requirements for face coverings to be worn at all times indoors with limited exceptions and in public environments where social-distancing measures are difficult to maintain to mitigate risk of Covid-19 transmission during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters;

Whereas, as of March 30, the Covid-19 pandemic has infected more than 30 million Americans resulting in a U.S. death toll of more than 550,000 people and climbing;

Whereas, as of March 29, the 7-day rolling average of new Covid-19 cases exceeds 65,000 new cases per day, which is comparable to the summer peak of approximately 67,000 new cases per day and an increase in the 7-day rolling average of over 10,000 new cases per day from just two weeks ago on March 15.

Whereas, five new variants of the virus that causes Covid-19 i.e., B.1.1.7, B.1.351, B.1.427, B.1.429, and P.1 are circulating globally and, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are variants of concern for the U.S.;

Whereas, according to the CDC, there is “evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease (increased hospitalizations or deaths), significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures” in these new variants of concern;

Whereas, all five variants of concern in the U.S. share one specific mutation called D614G and evidence suggests that variants with this mutation spread more quickly than viruses without;

Whereas, as of the week of March 13, all five variants of concern have been detected in the U.S. and the CDC announced on April 07 that B.1.1.7 is now the dominant strain in the U.S.;

Whereas, as of March 25, only 14.8% of Americans and 12.9% of Arkansans have been fully vaccinated with an approved Covid-19 vaccine;

Whereas, the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) extended Covid-19 vaccine eligibility on March 30 to all Arkansans 16 years of age or older, it is unclear how many in our general campus community consisting of over 27,000 students will receive the vaccine;

Whereas, certain students, faculty, and staff of the University of Arkansas fall into high-risk mortality categories if they become infected with Covid-19 and vaccine effectiveness against new variants of the virus that causes Covid-19 is unknown;

Whereas, the seasonal influenza season in the U.S. typically begins in October and individuals may dismiss Covid-19 symptoms as a simple flu;

Whereas the state mask mandate ended on March 30 and, according to the Associated Press, Governor Hutchinson stated that school districts will likely have a local option for masking and businesses can also have their own requirements;

Whereas, the University of Arkansas may re-open its doors for face-to-face instruction without social-distancing measures;

Whereas, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), pandemic waves can be separated by months and an immediate return to normalcy without mitigation strategies might be premature in the post-peak period when recurrent events are still possible;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the University of Arkansas Faculty Senate supports the continuation of the requirement that face coverings be worn at all times indoors with limited exceptions and in public environments where social-distancing measures are difficult to maintain, until the CDC declares the wearing of face coverings in public buildings no longer necessary.

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