

0:01

good morning everybody

0:06

we're on good morning

0:15

good morning colleagues it's great to see everybody um and to welcome you back uh happy new year to everyone hope that

0:21

you and your families are well and healthy that you've had some time to relax and reflect and that you're ready

0:27

uh ready to go as we gear up for the start of spring 2022 in just over one week i'm joan freeny mundy i'm the

0:33

president of the university of maine and our regional campus university of maine at machias i'm happy to be talking to

0:38

you this morning and i will introduce my colleagues in a few minutes first of all i'll make just a couple of comments

0:44

i want to thank you all for attending and for bearing with us with the change in topic this originally had been about

0:50

budget but that's been superseded but what i think is a more um relevant and pertinent topic for everybody it's

0:57

pressing for all of us and that is how we are thinking about and dealing with covid right now as we get ready to

1:02

reopen next week we will reschedule and have a budget town hall sometime soon

1:08

let me acknowledge first that so many people have struggled with and are still struggling with covid and it's sad and

1:14

difficult consequences as the highly transmissible omicron variant is now responsible for 95

1:20

percent of covid cases in the state of maine the case numbers in maine continued to increase

1:26

number of hospitalizations is increasing and so we um are sympathetic and aware that so many in our community are

1:33

are coping with the the results of that i want to thank everybody who's working so hard and has been to keep everyone as

1:40

safe as possible the science advisory board the t3 testing team our ums covet

1:45

operations group and their university main sister system leader chief gavin the wastewater testing team our testing

1:52

will resume next week and all those who staff the booster and vaccination clinics including humane

1:58

nursing students who are also working around the state and to all of our administrators faculty

2:03

staff and students who've taken responsibility and been vaccinated 89 percent of our on-campus population is

2:10

fully vaccinated you've been boosted you've registered your vaccinations boosters and exemptions with

2:15

point-and-click you have continued testing as required and there will be more of that and you're isolating and

2:21

quarantining as appropriate we owe you all a lot of gratitude thank you so the point of today's town hall which i'll

2:27

just briefly describe it's to help us reconnect to what we have been doing so steadily across this pandemic but it's  
2:34  
also to reframe a little bit the conversation for where we are and where we are now headed  
2:40  
we are at a new place with this pandemic and you know that if you're reading the papers and watching watching the  
news um  
2:47  
and looking at the national discussion and the discussion in the state of maine dr shah is doing a number of very  
2:52  
interesting presentations from maine cdc and those are worth watching  
2:57  
the the conversation is shifting because this pandemic is ongoing and endemic  
3:03  
and there's movement from doing all that we can do to try to prevent more cases of this d disease  
3:09  
to recognizing that even doing all that we can do can't stop omicron  
3:14  
we need to use every single tool we have vaccinations boosters testing appropriate face coverings distancing  
3:22  
avoidance of large gatherings involving food as well as the new treatments that are emerging daily and the science that  
3:28  
helps us we need to use all of that of course to focus on preventing serious illness and death  
3:34  
but here at umaine and you made machias and across the system we're making a little bit of a shift along with the  
3:39  
rest of the country from focusing only on how policies and rules alone can have  
3:45  
significant impact to how those policies and rules together with new and heightened expectations for  
3:52  
taking personal responsibility for where we are that's what we need even if everything everyone does  
3:58  
everything perfectly right now this pandemic is raging on so what stays the same  
4:04  
we are committed here at the university of maine to continuity of learning for our students and continuity of the  
4:10  
operations that support that learning as chancellor malloy wrote last tuesday we're going to start on time with  
4:16  
classes beginning as scheduled two weeks from today on january 18th we wrote that two weeks ago last week i mean  
we're  
4:22  
working to do this with in-person learning consistent with the current plans for about 90 percent of  
4:28  
universities across the country and of those 98 that are starting on time so we  
4:34  
will be here we will be in person and we will be adjusting and watching and being very very careful as we go and that's  
4:40  
what we wanted to talk to you about today uh we continue to update policies and practices you'll see those  
4:46  
announcements coming in the next couple of days using what we've learned over two years for how to combat the  
spread of covet  
4:53  
and how to avoid serious illness we're watching the science the patterns around the world of omicron to see when and if  
4:59  
it begins to peak what we can learn about booster and vaccine efficacy with new variants what's currently

5:05

recommended for face coverings and more so all of that all underway but as the

5:11

the biggest point i'd like to make right here really is that as we did last semester and those preceding it we're doing this together as a community

5:18

looking out for ourselves and each other in the best ways that we can decide as we go forward um

5:24

in in science tells us this variant is probably more contagious than delta but may result in milder cases um and

5:32

particularly for those who are vaccinated there may be a shorter transmission period for those who have the disease so here's

5:38

what we're going to do in making a decision to open on time and to come back to campus we considered all of the

5:44

options that you can imagine i think we've read every article we've talked to all these different groups and leaders

5:50

we've discussed them thoroughly and by we i mean the system leadership and the campus leadership as well as faculty staff and students

5:57

and we've landed where we are with a priority on keeping learning going largely here and in person

6:03

going fully remote would simply be too blunt an instrument to use at this time

6:09

paraphrasing what some of our deans said we are no longer waiting for an after this is the reality we are in now there

6:16

isn't some magical later when we aren't living with some level of covet at least that's how it looks right

6:22

now and we need to be a university right now and universities are open for their

6:27

students for their state and working to keep learning going as best we possibly can but doing this well will take all of

6:34

your help your flexibility accountability and compassion and willingness to adjust because these next

6:40

two weeks will be crucial we'll watch what happens and then we'll see what we need to do as we go forward

6:46

in a new yorker article recently scott gottlieb who is a former fda director said that what we need to do now is to

6:53

try to empower individuals to act to mitigate their risk and to mitigate

6:58

societal risk collectively and you see this happening across the university across the country

7:05

as as we work to say pay attention to what's out there watch the news watch uh

7:10

guidance coming from authorities and then do the very best we can to keep each other safe

7:16

we don't do this lightly if you watch what's happening again around the state particularly in k-12

7:22

which has opened but which is bumping up against all kinds of challenges in fact the commissioner of education talks

7:28

about schools facing unfathomable challenges we probably will too but we're going to do our very best to keep

7:34

learning going and to do this together practically speaking a lot of the details are being worked out right now

7:40

and you will hear more about them in this call at a high level and then in communications over the coming days  
7:46  
we're trying to think about all the scenarios imaginable what happens when students can't get here because they've  
7:52  
tested and they remain at home in isolation and they can't be here in class or they're close contacts and  
7:57  
they're quarantining what about students who are here in orono or nearby but not well enough to  
8:02  
go to class or faculty staff and students who can't be here because their children or others close to them are ill  
8:09  
or because schools or daycare centers must close all of those circumstances are what we face right now and so we're  
8:14  
trying to figure out how we manage this together flexibly to serve everyone as  
8:20  
well as we possibly can we'll need to be reasonable and accommodating how everything will work that is what  
8:26  
happens when a professor needs to offer instruction remotely or in hybrid form for a few days  
8:31  
because a few students can't be there or because the professor him or herself is ill we're going to have to take those  
8:38  
case by case and and figure out how to proceed we'll take the semester in chunks we'll watch what happens in the first  
two or  
8:44  
three weeks and adjust as the data and the science and our circumstances um dictate so with that i'm going to now  
8:51  
turn to our panelists and ask each of them to say a little bit they'll introduce themselves and they will then make a couple  
of comments to  
8:58  
get us started and then we'll turn to your questions and thank you for sending those questions in  
9:03  
i will begin by calling on vice president um and provost uh john ballen  
9:10  
thank you joe i appreciate that um so along with the president i would also like to acknowledge and thank all  
9:16  
of you who continue to work so hard in your efforts to keep everyone as safe as possible and to continue to be there for  
9:23  
our students in the entire community i mean we're two years into this pandemic and it's not been easy  
9:30  
as you heard president we continue to follow the guidance of research scientists and the cdc on how  
9:36  
best to manage covid on our campus and we hope to minimize these large outbreaks and the worst impacts of covet  
9:43  
on our community especially serious illness or hospitalizations you know thus the vaccine mandates  
9:48  
required masking and all the other aspects that you heard the president say  
9:54  
we know that omicron is highly contagious and delta is still circulating out there  
9:59  
and that likely other variances you know will probably emerge uh and so there really is this shift from eradication to  
10:06  
mitigation and harm reduction in how we approach covid so you know as you've  
10:11  
probably read and heard quite a bit you know the new normal with cova unfortunately is not living without it  
10:18

so at the start of this semester you know we may see some increased rates of absenteeism uh but since copen will be here you know

10:26

with us for longer than those first two weeks of the semester as you heard the president say we are

10:31

planning on starting as planned because we know that there's you know an academic and social emotional toll of

10:37

remote learning and we're committed to giving our students as normal a year as possible

10:43

last fall fatty showed a very reasonable approach and we're accommodating with students

10:48

uh and we received very few negative comments or feedback it says a lot about our faculty

10:54

and our staff who are always here i would continue to encourage fatty to

11:00

con to work closely with their their chairs and their directors and deans as

11:05

we navigate this semester as the president said we will continue to monitor the situation and adjust as

11:10

needed so thank you again really appreciate everything that you do

11:16

thank you provost vollen and we'll of course have questions and provost following we'll jump back in i'd next like to turn to vice president robert

11:22

dana to introduce himself and make some comments thank you very much well welcome

11:27

everyone we've missed you over the break but uh here we here we are getting ready to

11:33

resume our uh very robust academic experience social uh academic intellectual and

11:41

things have changed there's no question about it so my mantra to myself has been to keep breathing

11:46

uh breathe deeply and try as best i possibly can to

11:52

relax to stay in touch with what's being written in the scientific literature what you can find in the

11:59

popular press one of the things that's surely changing and we're changing with

12:05

it is that the degree of personal responsibility that people must take is ever increasing

12:12

but that's that's the world we live in anyway that's the uh academic collegiate experience we

12:18

want people to be self-reliant and that's going to be true

12:24

here and so we're applying our prevention messages uh taking care of one's self

12:31

reporting when one isn't feeling well masking and washing all the

12:37

things that you know about we're still encouraging people to be mindful of gathering in

12:42

large groups hoping that everybody would get boosted and vaccinated if they're not already

12:49

done that but as a campus will come together we'll behave much the way we behaved last semester we're really not

12:57

in a position if you will to control this in a way that we can put

13:03

everything into a bubble and isolate and quarantine our way out of this it's going to have to be

13:09

all of us coming together as a community we'll do it i feel very very confident we've uh

13:14

we're smart we're industrious we're capable and we care for each other so thank you very

13:21

much thank you robert um joanne would you like to introduce yourself and make some

13:26

comments hi good morning everyone joanna stramski

13:32

here vice president for for finance and administration and chief business officer

13:38

i would just say that um i'm sorry that i'm not here to present the budget today because that that

13:46

that would mean we wouldn't have to be talking about covet again but we'll do that later we'll get to the budget later

13:52

um i would just say uh that uh a couple emphasize a couple of words already

13:58

uh mentioned this morning and that includes flexibility and care

14:04

and i just would remind everyone to to take care of each other at this time

14:11

we've got such shortages in in health and um

14:17

in in our restaurants and here at the university that uh we we all have to

14:22

keep our patients uh and um just watch out for each other and take

14:27

care of each other and show great compassion continue to show

14:32

great compassion this time and and and be be careful and um

14:38

and use that good common sense that's already been mentioned uh and i guess that's the i where where

14:44

i would start but sean letters dan claus

14:51

hey i'm daniel walls i'm the vice president of academic affairs in the uh the head of campus at the university of maine at machias um we were excited to

14:59

start the semester back up this last fall was was was very successful uh we're really proud of our our students

15:05

and faculty and staff and how they uh how they complied with all the all the protocols and and we had a very very

15:13

small number of uh of confirmed cases and we continue to work closely with the umaine system and our partners at the

15:19

university of maine as we as we start up this semester

15:24

thank you dan and zach wilds good morning everybody i hope you're all

15:30

doing well as we're finishing up winter break here my name is zach wiles um i'm the president of the undergraduate

15:36

student government at the university um so as a student myself and as the president uh advocating for students i

15:43

feel obligated to share a little information on student preference on learning uh at least with the people that i've talked to  
15:49

um people come to the university for an education yes but they also come to the university uh to engage with  
15:56

other students and to engage with the events and activities that the university offers um

16:02

students pay their hard earned money or go into debt for this experience um and expect it uh

16:08

for two years you know obviously covet uh stunted a little bit of what the university has to offer students um but

16:14

from the last semester in the fall i heard nothing but good things from students um and the university of maine

16:21

had very very uh impressingly low numbers in regards to covid

16:28

and this semester going into this semester with uh 97 percent of fully vaccinated

16:35

resident students i see it as uh a good option uh to go in person uh obviously

16:41

proceeding cautiously as many have said before me here um and those who want to be online will take the online classes  
that we have to

16:48

offer those aren't going away um but you know students love to talk with

16:53

students it'll be with students they'll go events with students they love to see what the university has to offer outside

16:58

of the classroom aside from that you know mental health has become more

17:03

important than ever with our students uh just because of the isolation that

17:08

students have faced uh when you combine covid and education in the same place

17:13

sitting in your bedroom for class is much different than getting up getting ready and going to class i think that offering  
that to students again

17:19

will be very helpful as we have already done continuing that will be good um and

17:25

working with the counseling center has been one of student government's big initiatives this year so hopefully that

17:30

will continue um and that's all that i have for an introduction

17:35

thank you very much zach we'll go to dick young thank you dick young executive director

17:41

of boxing services also my role is on the covert operations group i'm in charge of

17:48

the testing protocols here on campus and a lot of other things that uh that support those areas uh just to let you

17:54

know that as people said it switched to the mitigating factors as we're moving in this direction but in terms of the

18:00

our operations we are still going to provide the same level of of uh testing and mass availability and of those types

18:08

of uh things on campus plus our messaging will be strong uh throughout campus so

18:13

uh that that i believe is in place and will continue to work and change as things things move forward um we are

18:19

testing a desktop call we we have the schedule posted out there so that's available for everyone to see

18:24

uh we are requiring negative best negative tests test for students to come to campus or that everyone will test

18:30

regardless of their vaccination status here on campus and we've got that set up and we're going to be doing that

18:36

through a unique setup with the self-observed testing process you know what you're excited to

18:41

deploy and get moving and that's happening today as we speak we just started with our first student today so that's that's good news uh and uh also

18:49

uh we will be working uh diligently into uh to get and see if we can get the

18:54

plans of booster clinics here on campus to help support the uh the community that's what i have uh president freddie

19:00

mundy thank you dick and uh and now we'll turn to dean nichols to introduce himself and also to

19:06

kick off the question and answer period where we have your questions coming in we appreciate

19:11

that um perhaps we could put up the slide again with the reminder about where to send your questions a lot of

19:17

these questions are very particular and very specific to individual cases and you are going to get the answer quite a

19:23

lot you know to talk to need to talk to your department um chair and or the head

19:29

of your school your dean so so there will be some general um guidance of course but flexibility will be key and

19:36

uh with that dee um please introduce yourself and and get us started on some questions oh hi uh hi president

19:42

freemundi and other panelists as well as people watching us um we welcome you i

19:48

just as i am d nichols i am in the college of education and human development and serving as

19:54

president of the faculty senate um i'd like to just build upon what zach said faculty are also very excited

20:01

about being on campus we love working with our students we love to see a

20:06

vibrant campus we definitely want what's best for our learners here at the university of maine and that is to

20:12

create a quality experience um however we do have lots of questions and we've seen quite a few questions already

20:19

popping up on the q a of this forum and we're moving those questions also over into another google

20:26

document so that people like me can help manage those questions so we'll do our best i would like to let you know that

20:33

the executive committee of senate has been gathering a lot of questions as well and we have

20:40

reached out to the president and provost and they were very quick to respond and we've been having ongoing conversations

20:46

and discussions about how to proceed so i'm going to go ahead and get us started

20:52

with the questions and they're kind of broken into categories and the first set of questions present free monday and



20:59

others really deal with teaching in the pandemic we can put it

21:04

under that heading and so the first one there is really about why would the university

21:11

not allow remote instruction for a few weeks at the start of the semester

21:16

or at least until after the omicron surge is peaked especially for instructors who are elderly

21:24

and are more at risk you've kind of addressed it in your opening but if you'd like to elaborate

21:30

on that i know that's a hot question for faculty thanks dee i'll start but i'm going to

21:36

turn to the provost um and there are a couple of related questions here's one if if an instructor tests

21:42

positive for covid are they allowed to continue teaching via zoom but back to the first one

21:49

which i've now let's see lost it a little bit um the question is um

21:56

is sort of what it's back to you know why did we make the decision to not move

22:03

remotely for the first couple of weeks until we had a little bit more data about omicron so but i wanted to pick pick up a bit on

22:11

the wording of the question why would the university not allow remote instruction

22:16

we haven't said that we're not allowing remote instruction right we we are our

22:21

hope and our expectation is that largely we will be here in person but we know that there will be cases and

22:28

there are several examples right here already where faculty are going to need to make a change they're going to need

22:35

to adjust offer remote options for their students um possibly change their

22:41

modality and i'll let the provost speak to the process for that but but i want to emphasize our flexibility and our

22:47

need to adjust as situations emerge so this is going to be hard folks right because because we've been a lot more

22:53

clear and and definite i think um in the past couple of semesters than we than we can

22:58

be now because there will be so many different circumstances that's why i keep coming back to the basic principles

23:04

continuity of learning continuity of the operation as much as we can possibly do it uh here and in person but john

23:12

perhaps you'd like to to say more on this yeah so i think one of the key words i think you'll hear a lot is flexibility

23:19

and uh and so one size does not fit all uh so like in that fir that the related

23:26

question that the president talked about you know if an instructor tests positive for covid are they allowed to continue

23:31

teaching via zoom well of course it depends on the severity uh so if someone is asymptomatic or they're filling up to

23:37

it yes they can but they'll need to work with their department head or their school director and and

23:43

and their um and their dean's office on those type of things but absolutely  
23:48  
i think you know that you know that's the key here is um one size really  
23:54  
doesn't fit all and uh to kind of get to that question why don't we just you know  
23:59  
go remote the first uh two weeks we don't know where this peak uh may  
24:04  
happen uh we uh you know at the same time if we said that right now  
24:09  
uh with you know a little over a week left before classes start that is also incredibly disruptive and as we know  
24:15  
there's a lot of classes that really can't they can't on a dime go remotely a lot  
24:22  
of lab classes as an example uh and so i i would just reiterate in um  
24:28  
is you know we are going to be looking at that flexibility and working with your you  
24:33  
know department chairs uh and dean's offices on this uh throughout this it's gonna be taken in chunks as as the  
24:39  
president said earlier we'll just have to keep monitoring and adjusting as this semester goes  
24:44  
on everyone john and joan uh yeah we've we've had these conversations so you  
24:50  
know as a faculty member really had a pressing need to make a change not just a  
24:56  
temporary change but they really felt like i've got to make a change to my modality the process would be as you  
25:02  
mentioned talk to your director or your department chair start that conversation there move the request up to the dean  
25:09  
eventually it makes it to the provost office and and each one of those can give a way in on how that can proceed  
25:16  
and then another path is you know to ask for an accommodation i think through ada  
25:21  
so those are like more you're talking about more long-term changes but if a short term comes up if you're sick or a  
25:29  
family member's sick or you you know even if i we had to go attend a conference you can make those changes to  
25:35  
your modality but you still would like us to check in with the director and the dean so that all the advising centers  
25:41  
can be aware of what's going on i i have another question john just on  
25:47  
this kind of topic what about students who also test positive  
25:53  
and are in quarantine or unable to make it to class does this instructor have the  
25:58  
flexibility to offer that kind of zoom option for students  
26:04  
they do they absolutely do that's what happened last fall right when students you know would be out for  
26:10  
a week or two uh the fact he as i was saying earlier had a very reasonable approach were very accommodating  
26:17  
i mean one thing and there's a there's another question here from associate dean tim cole  
26:23

saying you know if students are demanding remote modality for an in person class no if pathy are not  
26:30  
required to change their modality but we would hope that they you know during those situations where where students  
26:37  
have a legitimate reason not to be in class for a week or two to try to help as much as possible  
26:44  
i think so as we we talked earlier in the week you know as an instructor who's been doing this  
26:50  
for quite a few years and i've always built in that type of flexibility for my students and that's but that is optional  
26:56  
for the instructor to make those types of decisions whether they wanted to do it asynchronously through a web  
27:02  
brightspace or have some type of zoom that would help the student navigate when they could attend  
27:08  
i'm going to look at a few other questions that are here um you know one of those is  
27:16  
if we remain face-to-face classes how will we accommodate the student needs oh we just answered that never mind uh  
is  
27:23  
there a trigger threshold for making a decision to go online  
27:29  
so i'll start with that one um again we're already seeing big numbers you know we're seeing we're seeing positive  
27:36  
cases when we don't even have everybody back on campus yet so um we're watching that but um if you  
27:42  
watch the the the sort of national discussion you'll see that there's a bit of a move away from  
27:48  
looking at positivity rates we the testing is now ubiquitous right  
27:54  
people are testing through our our t3 process but people are doing  
28:00  
you know at home test kits and working with their own physicians and so forth so we can't even really know what  
28:06  
our numbers are actually our our focus i think is shifting to take care of people  
28:11  
who are ill help people understand what it means to self-isolate or self-quarantine without  
28:18  
getting a message from maine cdc or from us because there will be those needs as people are are trying to be responsible  
28:25  
on their own so that makes it very difficult to talk about a threshold it's not sure what it would be a threshold of  
28:31  
but we certainly will be monitoring and adjusting and again trying out as a start the way of a way  
28:38  
of doing this which has a lot of responsibility sitting with individuals with faculty who will need to be  
28:44  
conferring with their chairs and deans where we're looking for sensitivity for flexibility for um for compassion  
28:52  
with that overarching principle of we're trying to keep the experience going it's not the answer people would like i know  
28:58  
people people would so many people would like to have just some tighter clearer numbers and and decisions but this is  
29:05  
where how we're going to do this is going to take a lot of work from everyone and a lot of communication  
29:11  
so there there's a couple of other questions that are here i mean we've kind of answered a little bit of these

29:17

but i just wanted there to pull it out again um

29:22

so the the scenario is they have a class a graduate class it meets for over three

29:27

hours it's in a you know a small not so well ventilated uh area or room

29:33

and they really do not feel comfortable teaching they're you know in that setting um

29:40

with what's going on right now and their question is do they can they switch to zoom and i'm going to do my

29:47

best to answer that john the answer is it's possible right there's two paths work with your

29:54

director and your chair flow through your dean and the provost for those to be reviewed

29:59

or ask for an accommodation through ada you want to build on that john

30:04

so um actually in that case in that example i would suggest that they try to find

30:10

another room a larger room to accommodate uh that if if they really have those concerns uh

30:17

so students have signed up this semester for a particular modality right and so

30:23

changing right at the last minute you know an in-person class to remote that the whole

30:28

semester is is something that we are really trying not to do uh there's always an

30:34

occasional case uh where you know that we have to uh go that route but it's

30:39

it's you know we're really trying to accommodate the modality that the students signed up for and registered

30:44

for uh and is you know thinking they're gonna be joining in next week um and so

30:52

so that's one piece and then you're right i mean they can go the ada route usually it'd be done earlier than this

30:58

but that's always an option that's a that's a pathway that they can can do if they have health issues themselves the

31:05

the faculty member uh thank you uh promise paul and i i um

31:12

some of the other questions there's this is more of a suggestion that's there in in this in this category about teaching

31:18

in the pandemic and it really gets back to communication and so the the the person who opposed

31:25

the thought says is there a possibility that our president and the chancellor

31:31

can continue to make statements to students and to remind them throughout the semester to be flexible that they

31:38

should be flexible along with the faculty as we fight to keep this in-person

31:43

learning going do you want to speak to communication at all sure i think that's a great idea and um

31:50

and again the kind of an idea that that will come from faculty and that we need to to have those ideas coming in um i

31:57

think i see you know we have zach right here our student government and student leaders can be very helpful also in

32:04

making sure those messages are clear the students who are living on campus

32:09

have an incredible network of supports and helps through the residence life system and therefore we can we can try

32:15

to amplify some of these messages there um it's it's a good it's going to be a a

32:21

challenge challenging and growing experience for all of us really to try to to manage this

32:28

thank you i um we're going to move over to concern for safety but there was one last question that was up there and it

32:34

was like you know can i permanently change the modality of my course and i

32:39

would say as a faculty member of course follow the normal processes for doing that um we have great reasons and in our

32:47

college for example uh our graduate students have wanted more online classes and that's been something we've been

32:53

working on for quite some time but there's a process for doing that and just to follow those normal processes and then remind faculty

33:00

that when there is a request to look over the schedule for whatever semester that you check the

33:07

modality that seems to be best again assuming it's approved by your program and others

33:13

i'm moving on over to concerns for safety we may come back to teaching as more questions come in

33:20

um but the the one that's up here for concern for safety is there a need to disclose to a class

33:27

that there has been an exposure to covid if a student test positive

33:34

go to dick or robert there well i'll start the um any um

33:42

uh individual who has not been vaccinated um into

33:48

uh test positive the appropriate folks where where there are close contacts will to you know the best of everyone's

33:54

ability be be notified uh we we expect and it's certainly been

34:00

true to this point that the classrooms have been pretty um very very safe places because people

34:08

are required to mask there is you know sanitary procedures

34:13

and places and students have done a great job so we have got to continue to do that and

34:20

we cannot weaken our resolve in that respect think you might want to add to it

34:26

compliment what you said uh robert that we currently there there is not a need to publicly announce that in front of

34:31

the class the ones that need to know will know and uh and most likely knowing the students that i instruct they come

34:38

tell me or text me so i know so um i think that's where where that's at and

34:43

the safety procedures are in place uh all all the same sanitary procedures we had in place last semester in place this

34:48  
year being stocked and checked and there are numbers on everything out there if things are low make the phone call and  
34:54  
the custodial staff has always been really responsive filling things up so i i think that'll be the same this  
34:59  
semester as well so following up on this uh so you know  
35:06  
recognizing that the omicron seems to be spreading more rapidly than the delta variant and other variants that we've  
35:11  
seen how confident are we that we can actually keep up with the testing on a  
35:16  
regular basis um and maybe building on that  
35:21  
well i i should just say first and foremost you know safety has been you know  
35:27  
the priority of the university of maine and you you main system since day one and  
35:33  
we've had great great outcomes so omicron is a different  
35:39  
uh variant and it's uh more transmissible we have a very um  
35:44  
multi-layered testing uh procedure we've now advanced these self-testing  
35:51  
opportunities which is going to take a great deal of pressure out of the system that is our testing system so people can  
35:57  
do that it's reliable they're pcr tests uh easily accessible and  
36:05  
reviewable every single day so that's going to take a great deal of pressure out of our system and as  
36:11  
richard young indicated the testing sites at esterber call will continue and  
36:18  
that's for symptomatic and asymptomatic people so right now it looks as though  
36:24  
if people use their usual methods plus the addition of the self-testing  
36:29  
we'll be in good shape thank you thanks um so  
36:35  
this question is an interesting one to me too it's uh the you know the president you noted in your in your  
36:41  
opening remarks that 89 of the people on campus are fully vaccinated  
36:46  
and the question really is does that mean eleven percent uh on our on-campus faculty and staff  
36:52  
and students have medical or religious exemptions um why don't we have a  
36:58  
hundred percent uh vaccination uh  
37:03  
so i'm gonna i'll start but i'm gonna turn to dick to help me be sure that we get this correct and if we if we need  
37:08  
more data we'll get that and get that back out to everybody but there can be lots of um  
37:14  
so fully vaccinated at this time with with cdc definition means two doses of  
37:19  
an approved vaccine and so there are perhaps people who for a variety of

37:24

reasons don't yet have their second dose but i i'll turn to dick um note also of

37:30

course that there are a special testing requirements for those who are not vaccinated and that is one response to

37:37

to uh to the to these numbers but dick more to say on this so that we're sure we're being precise here

37:43

yes i i the data that the 89 is accommodation uh through the campus data

37:48

uh trying to extrapolate all the staff and faculty this wasn't exceptionally clear but our residence halls are close

37:55

to 95 percent of our student population there of that and there are some there who do have exemptions and they are

38:02

required and followed up to test at estabric and actually our compliance is tracked and we know who those people are

38:07

and our res life staff has been very good of going out and reminding those folks to get back down to test uh during

38:13

the week they have 10 days to do that before that they as non-compliant in

38:18

terms of the um the vaccination percentage we've got a number of groups of uh which is part-time faculty and

38:25

instructors we have some other students who are coming in this this spring who we've been tracking and working with

38:30

quite readily to get them fully vaccinated and remember they may be fully vaccinated but again

38:36

until the card is uploaded into the system uh we won't get that number to record so in in our in my book fully

38:43

vaccinated means two doses and you gotta upload your card and the point click and then we get the compliance report so

38:49

those numbers are based on the number of people who are and who place the cards up so there's been some delays on on

38:54

those cards and we're doing the same for the booster shot we are collecting and requesting people uh to

39:01

put their booster shot vaccination card up into point-and-click as well as we move forward the february one uh so we

39:08

have an estimate there of a good number of where we are with the boosters as well so um it does take a little time

39:15

from getting it up into the system but we are tracking it you might also mention that

39:22

not being you know not if you're in that 11 you there are procedures that you must

39:28

follow that is we're not saying it's okay you're not vaccinated you're not testing there are compliance

39:34

responsibilities and students can be caused to leave the university for not

39:41

following them uh faculty and staff of course that's a human resources issue but

39:47

it's not that you just can't do it you've got to do something that complies with all of the expectations that's

39:53

correct robert i'd like to say thank you i'd just like to use this as an opportunity as an

39:58

elected member to represent faculty that back in may the faculty senate unanimously

40:05

passed that we would like to require all faculty staff and students to be fully  
40:11  
vaccinated we're very happy at the rate that our students have done that we hope our faculty and staff  
40:16  
can get that also done at the same level so just like to use as an opportunity  
40:22  
um will there be a strong campus-wide recommendation to  
40:28  
avoid in-person meetings um you know we have college meetings department  
40:34  
meetings faculty senate meets we met face-to-face in the fall with the zoom option  
40:39  
should we be considering um you know moving more online  
40:45  
so this is a good great question actually i i was this may be a little too flippant i think what they're  
40:53  
they're um there could be a a rec well let me think will there be a strong to avoid in-person meetings what  
40:59  
there won't be is any campus requirement to have all meetings in person that's what i wanted to say right  
41:05  
we need to we're doing a lot of meetings by zoom and have been all through the break even last even last semester i  
41:12  
think we want to stay flexible and sensible here small rooms with with food and drink our  
41:18  
bad idea seems to me i certainly won't host any meetings like that um and if we're able to uh to get  
41:25  
our business done by zoom keep things going uh for for certain meetings i think that that's a reasonable thing to  
41:31  
do also if we're able to distance and the masking becomes very important i'll take this opportunity d if it's okay to  
41:38  
turn to the mask question um and again i'm going to look to dick and robert on this one uh there are a couple questions  
41:45  
about the efficacy of cloth masks questioning their use and wondering if  
41:50  
various types of surgical masks masks might be more serve better protection  
41:56  
stand by for some guidance on this coming very soon but indeed what we're seeing nationally  
42:02  
we're taking that very much under consideration here that there will be supplies of certain  
42:09  
types of masks and i'll turn to dick to explain that big a big deal for masks is that they  
42:15  
need to fit properly and they need to be worn properly and so as much as anything making sure that people have their  
noses  
42:21  
covered making sure that their masks fit tightly and certainly going toward these surgical masks will be will be i think  
42:28  
advantageous for all and we need to keep publicizing that but dick can say a bit more about the supply and how that will  
42:34  
work yes thank you uh president for any monday the as we've done in the previous  
42:40  
semesters uh there are stations around campus those will be the same and there will be surgical masks these are three  
42:45  
three layer masks that we have in inventory here on campus they will be delivered to sites and and maintain the



42:50

stock obviously if there's a phone number there if you see one that's uh been diminished don't hesitate to call

42:57

and everyone can has a has a right to go ahead and make that call and get those filled up and the fm staff will respond

43:03

and fill them so those are gonna be ready available all the sanitization methods are gonna be available uh in

43:09

terms of uh uh your mass the what the cdc is recommending now is proper fitting of the mask is critical uh is

43:16

it's it's not just wearing a mask it's properly fit with the nose clamp it closes down hugs the chin and comes in

43:23

tight on the cheeks and so that's that's what they're advocating for and that's what we have in our messaging here on

43:30

campus will support that let me just bounce back quickly um

43:36

on the question of meeting this is a that's a great example of its president covered it's a great example where we

43:43

use our own best judgment we have the technology and i we're already seeing lots and lots of people

43:50

uh doing what seems reasonable and not being too [Music]

43:56

you know overly adhering to some unknown rules but just to be

44:03

sensible if you will so there are a lot of people meeting by zoom meetings and

44:09

cutting out meetings where they don't really need to exist and one thing to add to dick's

44:14

message is we have some 60 000 mass on hand and

44:20

those are replenished as needed there's a question about can faculty

44:26

require students to use surgical masks in class you can encourage them you can point to them to where they are you can

44:33

remind them about fit all of the things that that makes sense for us with what we know now there are also questions

44:38

about the n95 masks so i understand it that gets more complicated there are fit

44:44

issues there are osha issues uh and so um i don't think i have any i don't have more to say on that dick may know more

44:50

about this uh your reference is correct president for anybody there are there are fit issues and there are osha issues when

44:56

especially when we talk about employees uh and so at this point in time uh we are we're still looking at we're still

45:02

getting information from the system's office and we'll continue to read that and go then if it becomes something that

45:08

we can move forward we will but at the current time uh we're not distributing those out

45:14

from a personal perspective i have a daughter who's a nurse in colorado she's

45:19

talking about double matching so i use the double surgical mass it's not as restrictive if you will as a

45:27

n95 mass which does cause quite a lot of restriction in the air flow but it's it's it's it's an easy

45:34

adaptation there are plenty of mass to do that

45:40

so um so again to again strongly recommend and encourage students to use the proper

45:47

mask you can point those out probably requiring is a different conversation that we would need to have an ongoing

45:53

continuing but definitely recommend encourage make sure that the students know that

45:59

they're available um so and and do your best to to make sure

46:04

that's happening uh if you're having a problem with student compliance which i did not have at all um in the fall just

46:10

again reach out to robert dana or or others and let them know

46:16

um so i'm gonna the other question i have is about the return testing uh and

46:21

we've had several conversations about this uh over the last couple of weeks

46:26

my understanding is that we really are requiring all students to uh

46:32

be tested but we have a lot more direct control of the ones who are residential that there's going to be kits in the

46:38

dorm rooms do you want to elaborate on that annie we did send a letter to all students uh

46:46

expecting that they come to campus uh with a negative test

46:52

that's highly encouraged students who live in residence will be also

46:57

required to come with the negative test and they will be tested on the first day of arrival which your

47:02

i did talk about esther brook will be available to off campus students and faculty and

47:09

staff and we'll also have the self-testing regimen many people are coming with binax

47:17

antigen tests uh they're coming with other pcr tests so it's it's it's we

47:24

will have a lot more data than any community that i'm familiar with dick you might want to add to that

47:30

uh that's very well spoken to dr dana um we we are where the testing is available you can say it's available to everyone

47:37

regardless of their vaccination status we have the ones that are that need to do it but everyone's welcome to participate in the testing and we are

47:44

testing all return is all students are required to test esther brooke is available for those from off campus and

47:51

they all as dr dana said received a message and and expressed how to go ahead and make an appointment and to get

47:57

that testing done so we'll be we'll be watching that as well i think from a faculty standpoint you

48:03

know things i've heard as a concern is you know hey i teach a 8 a.m class on tuesday morning you know students who

48:10

are non-residential who come in will they know to go get their tests uh

48:16

beforehand um you know we're so i know there's some anxiety a little bit around that but you the message has gone out to

48:23

students to all all students to have a negative test before coming to class

48:29

i'll just i'll add to that that what we're hearing from other institutions is that

48:34

that when that happens cases are getting identified and students are staying away i mean that

48:39

the news is available very broadly and we we know our students and their families are concerned about their

48:45

health and um watching what happens and so i i do think that the message is out

48:51

that um that we're that testing is one of our most important tools testing and

48:56

masking and distancing and one thing to add to that last semester we had a tremendous number of

49:02

students who did miss classes they did not go to classes because they were symptomatic not of covered but of

49:10

more run-of-the-mill respiratory viruses and illnesses and so our students are very uh adherent to the

49:17

idea of you know protecting others and a lot of faculty asked about that was that indicative of a large covid

49:25

presence but really um 90 of the people were getting evaluated through the health services

49:32

were found to have other respiratory illnesses so we're probably going to see that continuing is that students

49:38

students will be good community members i fully expect it so the next question here is is kind of

49:45

dealing with the ventilation and so what would the process be for a faculty

49:50

member who has concerned about their room not being well ventilated or what if it's a student who's also a similar

49:57

concern how would they how would a faculty member go about the the question

50:02

indicates that the department purchased some different air filtration they only have a limited number of those

50:08

uh any suggestions on air uh ventilation here uh i think we'll turn to joanne our

50:15

facilities folks are are fantastic very tightly connected in to the um covet

50:20

operations group of course and joanne i'm assuming that there would be a pathway to to address those requests

50:27

yes i i think the work order system for sure i think we could perhaps uh send

50:33

out a communication uh compu communicating how best to uh get that kind of uh air

50:39

ventilation system installed that you purchase

50:48

okay i'm thank you i there's i joined i think you can see these and and and and

50:54

john it's kind of a complicated question that came about the covid portal um that they

51:00

had received is there any can anyone who sees that question can you

51:05

respond to that that seems really specific and one that i haven't heard yet

51:10

okay so for those who can't see the question i'll just repeat it and give everybody time to figure out who can

51:16

who can um address it best so this is from a faculty member who's vaccinated boosted

51:22

uh has verified with point-and-click they got a message that they're too

51:27

expected to participate in asymptomatic testing for the semester um and they haven't heard of anyone else

51:34

getting such a message they were also asked to provide a consent form i can i can say myself that i signed up for a

51:40

sim for an asymptomatic test it's uh today and um i i also was asked i got a

51:46

text message that i needed to fill out again the consent so i i definitely know that happened but

51:51

this sounds a bit different from this so dick this may be one we need the person to check in with you directly

52:00

or something technical problems yes that would be that would be great if they would reach out to me and and i can look

52:06

into that with uh with the people who operate the system to see what might have been an error because that that's a little above and beyond what normally

52:12

goes out right i mean we really are encouraging that people test uh and there's plenty of access right now to

52:18

doing that but that's different than what would appear to be sort of a a requirement

52:23

why don't we complete the test with an at-home kit how do you verify

52:28

that i did one yesterday um i didn't give you my word it came back negative but

52:34

okay good you've reported that now um that's a huge problem we don't necessarily

52:39

have a great way to do that as far as i understand we have a process that we'll use with our students coming in

52:46

where we'll track that but how we move that into the system at least my understanding is still not fully smooth

52:54

we track positive tests we track all positive tests and negative tests for safe return we are tracking

53:00

those there but they're indeed we don't track all negative tests on campus so if d had tested positive

53:07

was he to report that to you uh he would do a self-report online the web uh self-report form and then then he would

53:13

be contacted from there and that would then go in the logger just so everybody knows and then that would be verified

53:19

for the system's office and he'd be released from testing for 90 days once it's in the logger so if that self-report form is critical to kind of

53:25

key that up maybe we'll uh make sure we get that publicized again and noted for everybody that's i was just gonna say that that

53:31

seems a good part of the communication process um a lot of the questions here are also talking about you know why do i

53:38

need to get the booster and um if i'm doing the testing

53:44

any any thoughts to that

53:49

i might just start by saying we know that the booster is

53:55

highly advised scientifically based best practice and uh it's part and parcel of the

54:03

entire covid mitigation harm reduction you know procedure

54:09

so one doesn't really substitute uh for the other so you know from my

54:14

perspective we're seriously recommending that we may well get to the point of requiring it but

54:19

one doesn't replace the other i i've just got a reminder about time

54:26

there are still a number of questions that we've not addressed but as we've done before we will work our way through all of them get communications out as as

54:33

possible um and i think um i think this has been really quite quite

54:41

a good session because your questions are are really deep and insightful and to me

54:47

they show that everybody cares that we really are trying to figure this out do our very best to to bring our students

54:53

back and the people i think do recognize the need for flexibility so we've put up one

54:59

last slide with a couple of reminders uh expectations for spring uh 2022 we um we

55:06

that last point and because we had talked about boosters we are all watching the cdc the federal cdc for

55:13

their next definition of what it means to be fully vaccinated where the the buzz is that it's likely to include

55:20

booster but we are not there yet uh however we're alerting people that that um that could come uh but but in any

55:26

case um i just want to thank everybody i want to thank the panelists for their for their wisdom i hope people

55:32

appreciate that that people are being honest and direct and when we don't have a clear answer to your question uh we'll

55:38

we'll either find one or know that it's something that needs to stay on our minds and that will continue to work through um but i do look forward to to

55:45

seeing you and to hearing from you as the semester opens we'll certainly be checking in on how things are going keeping track and and

55:52

looking to adjust as we need to with that then i think i will i will

55:58

see if any panelist wants a last last word uh and otherwise we'll close on time at noon uh darren i would like to

56:05

have one i just would like to reiterate that the questions that are in the q a and the questions that have been

56:10

submitted online that we are gathering those we greatly appreciate that it helps inform the process it helps us

56:17

think through things um you know questions and concerns are always welcome solutions are welcome even more

56:23

uh be sure to reach out to your uh elected senators um because we can keep this conversation going um and just uh  
56:31

so thank you dee i'm i did get a couple of questions on my text messages and so forth and

56:38

perhaps the president can address it it's it's important the chancellor issued a notice this morning which i i

56:45

think does call for flexibility i actually find it very consistent with what we're talking about here but if the

56:51

president might take just a moment to talk about the comportment of what we're talking about what the chancellor's

56:57

talking about it could help people as they read through that right so that that message came out

57:03

during this call uh but it i don't think people will be surprised at the

57:08

alignment between what we're talking about here in this meeting and what you see in that message there's just been

57:14

tremendous uh close conversation and planning among all of the presidents and the law school

57:19

dean among our campus incident commanders and the system staff this is a this is a position that we're trying

57:25

to take for the entire system which is one of flexibility perhaps a bit more local decision making uh than we

57:32

sometimes are able to have because the circumstances are very different at a umaine fort kent than they are for us

57:38

and so you will see differences across campuses but uh but the chancellor's message is very clear that we are

57:46

prioritizing safety using everything that we know but also looking to keep moving forward so robert i'm not sure if

57:52

that addresses but but i i i think these are aligned that we are all headed in the same direction here

57:58

i i read them that way too and you know i think there's just a very big backbeat

58:04

of we will change as change is required we'll be open we'll be flexible we'll be

58:10

accountable to each other supportive and and it's an imperfect uh situation

58:15

because as you you the president has said many times the viruses is the operating

58:21

principle here so it's yeah okay then well i just want to thank

58:26

everybody again um you'll be hearing more from us and and keep your questions coming uh really do appreciate the

great

58:33

work that everyone does and wish you the best the best for the rest of the week and also of course then when we jump in

next

58:39

week in a bigger way thank you all again