



January 21, 2022

Re: UCI Announcement 1/31/22 Return to Campus

Dear Students,

On behalf of both the undergraduate and graduate student governments, we would like to clarify that we were **not** consulted in the lead up to UCI's decision to resume in-person instruction beginning on January 31, 2022. In fact, we had specifically asked UCI leadership at the advent of the Omicron variant last quarter and at the beginning of this quarter to consult with the student governments in order to have clearer messaging about potential campus policy changes and to ensure that policies and communications reflect the needs of our most vulnerable student populations.

First, we recognize that students are not of one mind about when and under what circumstances the campus should reopen for in-person instruction. There are, however, several concerns that students share that we would have wanted addressed prior to any announcement. Unsurprisingly, those concerns were not addressed in the Provost's email to the student body.

The revised mask guidance was made in response to the transmissibility of the Omicron variant. At present, upgraded masks like N95 and KN95 masks are seldom in stock at stores within walking distance of UCI, such as Target in the University Town Center or Albertson's in the Albertson's Plaza. Similarly, it has been difficult for some students to find, afford, and purchase these masks from online retailers. In any consultation we would have stressed that it is essential that UCI have masks readily available for students (as is currently the case at several other UCs) if a reopening were to occur.

There was a COVID outbreak, as classified by Cal OSHA, last week in the Humanities Instructional Building for which the administration recommended weekly testing for those who were in the building during the outbreak periods. If the student governments were consulted, we would have wanted to know more about the adaptability of the testing services on campus for when, not if, outbreaks occur.

The Provost’s email mentioned the need for “grace and flexibility,” which are fine sentiments but profoundly unspecific for explaining what, if any, new policies exist to assist immunocompromised and/or disabled students in dealing with a far more transmissible variant. Similarly, any communication should have been responsive to the needs of students with dependents who are dealing with challenges in caregiving services because of the recent pandemic surge. If consulted, we would have suggested that any communication to the student body specifically include new policies for our most vulnerable, if any, and links to FAQs that could ameliorate the concerns of our students and staff at heightened risk.

Lastly, we would have urged UCI leadership to explain more about the science that underpins their decision, including sharing the current rate of vaccine booster compliance and what the important positivity rates and case count thresholds are for in-person instruction. If Anteaters wait until the last minute before the policy deadline to receive a booster, then it may not be fully effective in a student’s system as they walk onto campus for the first time. Many students have also not yet returned to campus or the Irvine area and would otherwise need to follow existing testing and sequestering protocols that UCI set in December.

The University of California’s shared governance model—in which students share in shaping campus policy and operations—is something that has defined its history and helped make UCI and the system that models for higher education around the world. We expect to live up to that tradition so that students can have confidence in the decisions that campus leaders make and that policies can be responsive to the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the community.

Oh behalf of AGS and ASUCI:

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