

3/8/22 [AllUnit] Poor communications and process to end the mask mandate

Dear colleagues,

MSP leadership was completely surprised to learn today that the campus mask policy has changed, effective tomorrow morning. We are appalled at the short notice and poor communication between the administration and faculty and staff. Until very recently we were told that everyone was required to enforce masking among colleagues and students, and that cloth masks were unacceptable. The Town of Amherst still has a mask mandate. Suddenly, three days before spring break, UMass does not.

We know that we have many members and students who are more than ready to be unmasked, and we also have many members and students who are immunocompromised and have been advised by health care providers that they can come to work as long as everyone around them is masked. The MSP has tried our best to protect all of our members' health and safety over the past two years.

This sudden change of policy was not negotiated with MSP. When we met with the administration and the director of Environmental Health and Safety last week, we were told that the administration was contemplating lifting the mandate in the future. The staff unions were asked for input, and we all said that it would make sense to lift the mandate at the end of March, after making sure there was no spike of cases after Blarney Blowout and spring break travel. We were led to believe that the administration was considering faculty and staff input. Apparently we were incorrect.

Because this administrative decision did not include a consultative process with the unions, nor with faculty, librarians, or staff, we suggest you directly contact the administration with your concerns about their communications and process. Please send your comments to the Chancellor (chancellorswamy@umass.edu), Vice Chancellor for Human Resources (wdb Brady@umass.edu), Provost (jmccarthy@provost.umass.edu) and Associate Chancellor for Strategic Academic Planning (tserio@umass.edu).

In the meantime, if you have health concerns (for yourself or your family), you absolutely should take the steps you feel are necessary to protect your health. We are here for each other. Please let us know if you need MSP's support.

In solidarity,

MSP Executive Committee