

8/05/21 Allunit: Health and Safety

Dear colleagues,

Based on a steady deluge of emails and calls from MSP members, with classes beginning in a few days, we have heard your concerns about safety and health on campus. MSP has looked at the data, submitted lists of questions, attended meetings, explained our concerns to the Chancellor and Provost, and made information requests of Environmental Safety and Health leaders for many months. Important questions remain, and we have asked for an emergency meeting with the administration on Monday to make sure our members will be safe when we are back in the classroom.

Compared to many campuses around the US, we know that UMass is in better shape because more than 90% of our students, faculty, and staff will be vaccinated, and we will have a mask mandate inside our buildings. However, data show that more levels of protection are required to keep us safe while spending hours indoors with large groups of students. The MSP has requested:

- Air quality data for every classroom and office building on campus (we have put in information requests for six months and we still have incomplete data)
- HEPA filters for spaces without effective MERV filtration
- Regular required COVID testing for students and employees (surveillance, pooled, or random testing) with regular reporting on results
- Masks available to students who need them, and for faculty and staff per our COVID agreement
- Outdoor tents for student meetings
- Clear guidance for faculty if students refuse to mask or are visibly ill in class
- Clear guidance for students about daily symptom checklists and quarantine
- Accommodations for faculty and librarians who have children under age 12 who cannot be vaccinated
- Benchmarks for when rising COVID rates (K-12 school closures, UMass student absences, ICU beds, or other metrics) would trigger classes going remote

We are looking forward to getting some responses on Monday. If we do not receive sufficient action on these concerns, MSP will consider further steps if necessary. For example, we have the right to file legal charges about the administration's failure to provide health and safety information, including air quality data; we can file grievances because the contract says the administration must provide a safe and healthy work environment; and we can file requests for information about the administration's cost-benefit analysis about health and safety protections. We also plan to bring in MTA's Health and Safety department to test air quality in classrooms and office spaces. If we find evidence that our members are being asked to work in unsafe

spaces, we will assist MSP members to assert your right not to work in an unsafe work environment.

We will not take these steps lightly, but only after repeatedly asking for clear communication and negotiation around health and safety protocols that will keep our campus safe. Given the spread of the Delta variant, good ventilation and frequent random COVID testing are essential to our safety. We also need assurances that faculty with young children will have the right to accommodations if they need them, to protect their unvaccinated children. We await clear communication from the administration on all of these points, and we will share the information as soon as we have it.

In the meantime, MSP members should know that you have the right to medical accommodations if you or your household members are at risk of serious illness. Please be in touch with the MSP office if you would like assistance getting the accommodations you need.

We want to reassure you that the MSP has your back. If childcare centers and schools close because of COVID, you will have the right to use your sick leave or FMLA leave, to make flexible arrangements with your students, to work remotely for a period of time, or to do whatever is necessary to care for yourself and your family. MSP will make sure that these rights are protected and that our members are not harmed. The union has won excellent family and medical leave benefits over time, and our members should understand these rights and use them whenever necessary. Please reach out anytime if you would like more information.

In solidarity,
The MSP Executive Committee