

9/05/21 Allunit: Updates and Labor Day

Dear colleagues:

Congratulations on completing the first week of classes! We have a few updates related to ventilation, COVID testing and protocols, buses, and an invitation to meet with our legislators next Friday.

First, a note of appreciation: we have been glad to hear from so many of you over the past couple of weeks; it has helped us to accurately communicate your concerns to the administration, and it also has highlighted the diversity of opinions across campus. Many of you have emailed us about unhealthy classroom spaces and your concerns about infection, especially now that students are testing positive. At the same time, we have many members who feel very safe because the community is vaccinated and masked. We hope you know that wherever you are, the MSP is working hard to represent you! We are continuing to push for reasonable health and safety measures that will be satisfactory to most of our members. If these measures fall short of the mark for your particular situation, we will help you find an accommodation. Don't hesitate to reach out to the MSP for support. With that, here are our updates:

1. Ventilation and air quality

MSP leaders have heard from many members with questions about air quality in particular classrooms and workspaces. Some of you have already reached out to EH&S and/or Facilities as well. MSP leaders have been deeply immersed in data on Air Changes per Hour (ACH), Cubic Feet per Minute (CFM), mechanical vs. natural ventilation, CDC and ASHRAE standards, and campus ventilation data. We know that there are many spaces on campus with insufficient air flow, so on Friday MSP leaders met with the MTA attorney who is an expert on indoor air quality issues. We shared with him the information on ventilation in campus buildings, and he promised to send us a report with his recommendations shortly. In the meantime, if you have particular concerns about a classroom or workspace, get in touch. We want to target our advocacy and prioritize the spaces that are in most dire need of review and remediation.

In addition to air quality data, MSP has asked for more outdoor tents to allow seminars and student meetings to happen outdoors. And we have asked for N-95 quality masks which protect us more than cloth or disposable masks do. We encourage everyone to use outdoor spaces and high-quality masks whenever possible.

We are lucky to have many MSP members who are experts in pandemics from various disciplinary perspectives. We have confirmed with the Department of Biostatistics and Epidemiology that the experts in “public health, infectious disease, and epidemiology” referred to in Tuesday’s email from the Provost’s office, which referenced optimistic outcomes from COVID models for campus this fall, did not include experts in infectious disease and epidemiology from their department. We hope they will be an integral part of these discussions in the future.

2. COVID testing and protocols

We strongly encourage all MSP members to take advantage of the free, unobserved COVID testing system on campus. You can pick up a kit at one of three locations:

- Campus Center Information Desk (2nd floor) or Public Health Promotion Center (1st floor)
- University Health Services (kiosk outside near the entrance)
- Mullins Center (kiosk outside near the ATM machine)

You attach your name and SPIRE ID to the test tube, swab your nostrils according to the directions, and drop off the sealed kit in one of the same locations:

<https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/coronavirus/covid-19-testing>

If we all are tested weekly, our colleagues and students will feel more confident that we are all staying healthy, and the university will have more accurate data on the spread of COVID on campus. You can encourage your students to take advantage of regular testing as well. The UMass COVID dashboard went live yesterday and should be updated weekly:

<https://www.umass.edu/coronavirus/dashboard>.

We’ve received many questions about the protocols surrounding positive COVID cases and their contacts. Only individuals who have tested positive for COVID (whether vaccinated or not) are required to isolate for ten days. All close contacts of a positive individual will be notified of their exposure by contact tracers. The CDC defines close contacts as individuals within six feet for a cumulative 15 minutes or more. If close contacts are vaccinated, they are not required to quarantine. They must wear masks at all times and be tested 3-5 days later. Unvaccinated contacts must quarantine for at least seven days. As always, a contact of a contact is not notified nor required to quarantine.

Faculty should make sure that students comply with the mask policy. Language for your syllabus and instructions for uncooperative students are the first item in the August 31st message from the Provost’s office: <https://www.umass.edu/provost/provost-mccarthy-communications>. The Dean of Students office has also reminded students to perform a self-check each day and not to come to campus if they show *any* symptoms of illness.

3. PVTA buses

We have heard from members concerned about the bus service on the B43. The PVTA continued the "no-school schedule" for this past week, which meant fewer buses, more crowding, and no express service. The regular schedule will begin on Tuesday, September 7. We will be following up with the administration to ensure that in the future, bus schedules match campus schedules. MSP has prioritized PVTA issues; many UMass employees rely on buses to fulfill our commitments on campus and at home, and public transit is essential to reducing carbon emissions caused by commuters.

4. Labor Day – virtual breakfast with legislators on Friday, September 10

Labor Day is a great opportunity to reflect on the many ways that unions have won rights and benefits for working people. The MSP is active in the Western Mass Area Labor Federation (WMALF) which represents almost 50,000 working people in our region. On **Friday, 9/10 at 9:00 am**, the WMALF is hosting a virtual Labor Day breakfast with legislators. More than 30 legislators plan to attend and this is our opportunity to talk with them about the issues that matter most to us – including the Fair Share Act, the CHERISH Act to fully fund public higher education, and using American Rescue Plan Act funds to support the UMass campus, including retrofitting buildings and upgrading HVAC systems to keep us healthy and to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. You're invited! This is a great and easy way to connect with local legislators and lobby on behalf of our staff, our students, and our university.

[Click here to register!](#)

Wishing you a happy Labor Day, and a healthy and sweet Jewish new year for those who celebrate it.

MSP Executive Committee