



July 1, 2021

Dear Gillings School Faculty and Staff Members,

In recent weeks, as more people venture out after being vaccinated, it has been good to see more Gillings people in person at the school.

My purpose in writing is to share the latest University information about community standards and to provide some perspective on the return to campus while waiting for more specific guidance from UNC leadership. I also will comment briefly on yesterday's tenure decision re Nikole Hannah-Jones and issues of race and racism.

Returning to campus. Many of you have asked questions about return-to-campus expectations, and we will provide more detailed information soon. As we [mentioned](#) recently, we are waiting to hear from the University's Office of Human Resources about whether we will receive approval to be a pilot program for remote/hybrid work. If the answer is "yes," we will have more freedom within the school to approve plans for specific groups to work remotely some of the time.

Regardless, as I have said repeatedly, we will not take a one-size-fits-all approach to returning to campus. We have worked with supervisors to assess positions across the school and will work with you to come as close as possible to achieving your preferences. We have used an equity lens as part of these considerations, identifying factors that could result in inequitable decisions, together with strategies, protections, and resources to promote equity in hybrid work arrangements. Still, employees alone will not make the final decisions. That responsibility is delegated to unit heads and school leadership.

As we return to campus, we want to ensure more flexibility, especially for staff, than there was pre-pandemic. We have learned a lot about the benefits of remote work, even some of the time, for people's mental and physical health. This is also an equity [issue](#), as many people have experienced a greater sense of workplace belonging and less stress since they began working remotely (some of the Zoom tools have really helped support inclusion!). We should not leave those lessons behind.

Many people have been working behind the scenes to keep our buildings safe throughout the pandemic and to prepare for our return to campus. Thanks, especially, to Facilities Manager Brent Wishart and his team. Thanks also to Taya Jackson Scott, vice dean; Kathy Anderson, associate dean for information technology and project planning; and, more recently, Gretchen Senez, our new assistant dean for human resources.

Even the thought of returning to campus is a stressor for many people. **We can ease into the return process.** If you have not been back on campus yet, consider coming in for a couple hours during the next few weeks to see what it is like. You may find it more reassuring and invigorating than you expected. Think about (and discuss with your supervisor) how you can experiment with hours to avoid peak bus travel. Commit to making time during the day to walk, meditate or find other ways to support your mental and physical health. After all, we are the school of public health. We can find ways to be healthier in our habits and workstyles. Talk with supervisors about special concerns. **We are committed to retaining the positive lessons-learned from working remotely.**

Community standards. On Wednesday, Chancellor Guskiewicz and Provost Blouin sent a [message](#) to the University community to communicate standards that will be effective starting July 12. I have included them below. Please pay special attention to the items regarding face masks and not asking others about their vaccination status. We must follow the University's standards, which will be evaluated periodically this summer and throughout the fall term. Clarification regarding some issues around masking will be communicated soon.

Effective July 12, these are Carolina's revised COVID-19 [Community Standards](#):

- **Get Vaccinated** — Getting an FDA-authorized COVID-19 vaccination is the best way for members of the Carolina community to protect themselves and others and to stop the spread of the virus.
- **Face Masks** — You must wear a face mask at all times while inside any University building. You may remove your face mask in personal workspaces; your residence hall room, suite or apartment and when eating, drinking or exercising. Masks are not required outdoors. Vaccinated faculty may remove their masks while teaching as long as three to six feet of physical distancing is maintained. Every week we will follow the science, monitor the situation and evaluate the mask standard.
- **Practice Healthy Habits and Be Respectful** — As Carolina returns to a typical, in-person experience, we are committed to the well-being of our community — not just physically, but emotionally.
 - Monitor your health, and if you have any symptoms listed on the [COVID-19 symptom list](#), do not come to campus. Please contact your doctor for guidance on steps you should take.
 - Respect and honor members of the Carolina community who wish to maintain their personal space.
 - Members of the Carolina community should not ask others for their personal health information, such as vaccination status. While receiving a COVID-19 vaccination remains the very best way to protect yourself on campus and is strongly encouraged by the University, vaccination is not a University mandate.
- **Carolina Together Testing Program** — Unvaccinated students will be required to participate in the Carolina Together Testing Program on a weekly basis. Voluntary, asymptomatic testing will remain available for all students, faculty and staff.
- **Contact Tracing and Quarantine & Isolation** — Quarantine and isolation requirements are in place for unvaccinated individuals and vaccinated individuals who are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. This includes students, faculty and staff who are contacted as part of local or University contact tracing.

With these revised COVID-19 Community Standards, several restrictions will no longer be in place. These include:

- Classroom and building capacity limits will return to normal.
- Event and gathering limits will be lifted.
- Building access will return to normal.
- UNC Dining and Transportation and Parking will return to near-normal operations.
- Domestic travel restrictions have been lifted, but [international restrictions are still in place](#).

If you have not been vaccinated, I urge you to do so now. With millions of people vaccinated, the evidence shows that vaccines protect against COVID-19 and are safe and effective. The mRNA

vaccines, especially, offer good protection against variants of concern. You will help yourselves, family members and friends and those in the school community.

Race and racism. The past year has been difficult, not just because of the terrible pandemic but also because of the light that has been shone on racism in this country and on this campus and the ways the pandemic has intensified inequities. Faculty, staff and students of color have felt it especially, and recent events surrounding the [appointment of Nikole Hannah-Jones](#) have exacerbated concerns. I am relieved and grateful for yesterday's [decision](#) by the University's Board of Trustees to grant tenure to Ms. Hannah-Jones. It was the right thing to do, and it likely would not have happened without intense engagement across the campus and beyond. We recognize that we still have a long way to go to make our campus and school a place where everyone feels valued. In matters of equity and inclusion, our resolve will not be deterred, and we will be guided by our [Inclusive Excellence Action Plan](#). We will keep working to make Gillings – and Carolina – a place that is welcoming for all and where everyone can thrive.

Happy Fourth of July. I wish you all happy, healthy, and safe July Fourth holidays. On the 4th, I will remember that independence was only applicable to some of the people in the country in 1776 – not to those who were bound in slavery – and that we must continue to work to achieve the dream of this country for everyone.

Thank you for all you have done to keep Gillings strong during the pandemic.

Best,



Barbara K. Rimer

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