

January 24th, 2022

Dear Highlander Community,

UC Riverside will resume in-person instruction on Monday, January 31. A small number of courses that were previously approved for remote instruction due to exceptional circumstances will remain remote, but all other courses will return to their Senate-approved delivery modes. If you are scheduled to teach a winter quarter course in-person and feel that your personal health circumstances have recently changed and you are no longer able to do so, please contact [UCR Disability Management](#) and work through our existing accommodation process.

This decision was made following careful consultation with other UC campuses, our public health advisory committee, the Academic Senate, student and staff leadership, and local health officials, along with an assessment of on-campus and community metrics such as case counts, available isolation space, positivity rates, and testing capacity. We are also mindful of the important social and psychological benefits for students, in addition to the pedagogical advantages, of being together in-person on campus.

Campus Has Been Open

Since I last wrote to you on January 14 about our instructional plans, we have seen the Omicron wave reach a peak and begin what we hope will be its much-anticipated decline. The campus has remained open, many staff (including those in my office) have been working on campus each day, faculty have been accessing their labs and studios, and many students have returned to on-campus housing.

Student housing, dining facilities, the Library, Highlander Union Building, Highlander One Stop Shop, Student Recreation Center, Student Success Center, bookstore and most offices have been open since the beginning of Winter quarter. Thank you to the staff, faculty, and student workers who have continued to serve our campus community both on and off campus during this period of disruption. For employees who have not yet returned, please follow the existing staffing plans for your unit and contact your supervisor if you have questions.

Conditions Are Improved

As planned, our temporary pivot to remote instruction allowed the university to slow down the repopulation of the campus, conduct testing for students and employees coming back from holiday gatherings, and provide time for those who tested positive to isolate and recover.

Reported cases among students and employees are down substantially since the start of the quarter. The number of students in isolation on campus is also down, following a peak in the second week of the quarter. Positivity rates and demand for testing are much improved following the expected surge immediately after the holiday season. And more than 4,000 employees have taken [COVID-19 tests](#) on campus since the start of the quarter.

Accommodations for Absences

Although we avoided the worst part of the Omicron wave, it is possible that case rates will remain elevated as we resume in-person instruction. Therefore, we expect there will be higher-than-normal student absences due to isolation and quarantine requirements.

To help students remain current in their coursework while following their prescribed isolation and quarantine protocols, I recommend that each department and program discuss how best to accommodate temporary student absences so that students don't fall behind. Because of the rich diversity of disciplines and pedagogies at UCR, accommodations are best set by faculty in consultation with their colleagues. And because instructors are not expected to track attendance and may not know why a student is absent due to privacy requirements, there is no expectation that these accommodations be tailored to individual students or reserved only for students impacted by COVID-19.

As was the case before the pandemic, instructors may determine the best way to manage their course if they become ill or are temporarily unable to teach in-person for another reason. This may include temporarily shifting to remote instruction until the instructor can return to the classroom. A letter from the Academic Senate will be forthcoming to Senate faculty with more specific information about instruction.

Health and Safety Precautions

I am grateful that our campus community continues to take COVID-19 health and safety measures seriously. We are more than 95 percent vaccinated as a campus. Booster requirements are in place. Indoor masking will continue, with strong compliance among our students and surgical and N95 masks now available on campus. Robust testing [protocols](#) also will continue for anyone who is unvaccinated, symptomatic, or exposed.

Environmental Health and Safety is making surgical and N95 masks available to all UCR employees. To request masks, click [here](#). The Well is offering a similar [resource](#) to UCR students.

As [announced](#) last week, employees should obtain their COVID-19 booster by January 31 and submit proof of vaccination in our new employee health records system by February 25. Information on where to obtain booster shots can be found on our [vaccines page](#). Student Health Services is collecting student booster records and will begin offering on-campus vaccinations to students this week.

Please remember to test before returning to campus, and do not return if you are sick. The employee testing site is open for all UCR faculty, staff, contractors, temporary and third-party staff, and volunteers, regardless of vaccination status. The site also is open to family members of UCR employees. Click [here](#) for hours of operation, to schedule an appointment, and for instructions on how to register. Short-term [parking](#) is available in lots 15 and 21.

Workplace Notifications

If an employee or student tests positive for COVID-19, they are instructed to report the information on the Daily Wellness Check. Information on reported cases will be published on the [Dashboards page](#) of the Campus Return website. Guidance for instructors who are informed that someone in their class has tested positive can be found [here](#).

Once again, I thank you all for your continued flexibility and patience as we navigate the complexities of this ever-shifting and extremely frustrating pandemic. With your help, I hope we can provide our students with the top-notch residential research university experience they signed up for, while maintaining our vigilance to ensure everyone's health and safety. I look forward to seeing your masked faces on campus.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Watkins
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor