

July 30, 2021

Colleagues,

I hope you are enjoying the summer! I recognize that many of you will remain busy over these next few weeks teaching summer courses, hosting new student orientations or training student-athletes. I am grateful for your ongoing dedication, and look forward to gathering with you as we welcome students back to campus and usher in an exciting, productive fall semester. Special thanks go to our Housing and Facilities teams as they help us prepare for a safe return.

Approximately 200 faculty and staff members joined us for our Town Hall this morning. Thank you for your time and thoughtful questions. As we discussed, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve. We fully anticipate that how we respond to ongoing impacts can and will change. We will continue to update our dedicated web pages as we learn new information. Please check the site frequently, <https://www.uscupstate.edu/announcements/>.

This last year was unquestionably one of the most difficult we've ever experienced in higher education. But I remain optimistic about the future as I look at what you accomplished under the most challenging of circumstances. The results of your collective efforts are clear. Because you all placed the health and safety of the campus community first, USC Upstate experienced relatively low COVID-19 case counts. The data show that because you adopted masks, practiced social distancing, and carefully tracked positive cases, among many other measures, we were able to continue in our mission to provide education excellence to the students we serve.

***I am asking you today to draw on what we've learned and work together to develop solutions to challenges that may still lie ahead.*** The pandemic is, unfortunately, not quite behind us. The highly transmissible Delta variant is a concern and we will need to remain vigilant in our efforts to minimize impacts on the campus community.

I am consulting with members of USC Upstate's COVID-19 Response Team, and we are underway on an approach to the fall that recognizes [CDC](#) and [SC DHEC](#) guidelines and the laws of our state. As a public, state-supported institution, we may not mandate vaccines or require proof of vaccination as a condition of enrollment. This is stated in legislative policy provisos 117.163 and 117.190.\*

We anticipate that the FDA will soon lift its ["Emergency Use Authorization"](#) for COVID-19 vaccines. This may provide additional reassurance to those who question the safety and efficacy of these vaccines. USC Upstate will soon launch a **"Vax UP"** campaign, and is participating in the

[White House COVID-19 College Vaccine Challenge](#). As part of these initiatives, we commit to educating our community and increasing vaccine access on campus.

Recognizing the low rates of vaccination against COVID-19 in young adults, increasing illness transmission rates in the Southeastern United States, and new variants, we will continue practicing public health measures as a campus community this fall. We will continue to encourage those who are ill to avoid other people and to contact Health Services to report symptoms or request testing.

In order to maintain a safe environment while returning to a vibrant on-campus experience, we are asking all Spartans to **“Mask UP when close UP.”** This means:

- Face coverings are expected in classrooms, Health and Counseling Centers, when using University transportation, and at crowded indoor events. In areas of high COVID-19 transmission, the CDC and DHEC advise mask use indoors in public areas, regardless of vaccine status.

Additionally, USC Upstate Health Services will provide:

- Access to free COVID-19 vaccines on campus
- Free COVID-19 antigen and PCR testing with same-day results
- Contact tracing and case management for positive cases and exposed individuals

We will continue to communicate with you as we learn new information. Currently, these are our established guidelines for students returning to campus.

I’ve read a lot about USC Upstate over these last several months. I’ve watched what you do. I know that USC Upstate’s strength lies in its diversity. We are committed to fostering an inclusive environment that affirms identity and embraces our core values of wellness, equity, and civility. We must hold these values close during this next phase of the pandemic.

Warm regards,



Bennie L. Harris  
Chancellor

**\* SC Legislative Provisos 117.163 and 117.190**

*117.163. (GP: COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination Restriction - Institutions) For the current fiscal year, state-supported institutions of higher learning that directly or indirectly receive funds appropriated or authorized through the general appropriations act shall be restricted from requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination for any student as a condition of enrollment,*

*attendance at on campus instruction, or residence on campus. In instances of off-campus learning events for which third party program providers require proof of vaccination, the third party requirements shall apply.*

*117.190. (GP: Masks at Higher Education Facilities) A public institution of higher learning, including a technical college, may not use any funds appropriated or authorized pursuant to this act to require that its students have received the COVID-19 vaccination in order to be present at the institution's facilities without being required to wear a facemask. This prohibition extends to the announcement or enforcement of any such policy.*

**University of South Carolina Upstate**  
800 University Way | Spartanburg, SC 29303

***Up is where we live.***