

August 6, 2021

Colleagues,

As promised, we are following up after last week's Town Hall. More than 200 members of our faculty and staff participated, and we thank you for taking the time to be with us.

These Town Hall events will be scheduled on a regular basis. It's important to me that we facilitate as much dialogue on campus as possible, particularly as we enter the fall. The pandemic is not yet behind us. As I have explained, we must work together to keep the campus as safe as possible while respecting the laws of the state. As of today, we may not mandate vaccines or require masks. We hope this will change for public institutions, but for now, we must focus on what we *can* do.

#### **News to Watch**

As I mentioned during the Town Hall, most public higher education institutions in South Carolina are aligned with the approach that we are currently taking; however, as you are aware, USC Columbia proposed a policy that would mandate masks for all students and employees at indoor events. Shortly after announcing that policy, Attorney General Alan Wilson ruled that USC Columbia's policy violated the legislative intent of a one-year rule meant to ban colleges from requiring vaccines or requiring only unvaccinated people to wear masks. As a consequence, USC Columbia reversed the mask requirement mandate.

Since that ruling, S.C. Sen. Shane Massey, R-Edgefield, questioned the Attorney General's ruling saying, "There is nothing in state rules nor law that prevents USC from requiring all students, whether they're vaccinated or not, from wearing masks while indoors on campus." And now, the South Carolina Supreme Court has been asked to interpret the state rule. As I said during our Town Hall, I am hopeful that we will have an option to put in place more protective protocols, and when that happens, we will adjust our policy.

Most of the questions we received during the Town Hall came from faculty who are wondering how to articulate and enforce expectations around the use of face coverings in class. Provost Schecter and Dr. Lisa Johnson, our Faculty Senate chair, address many of these questions in new revisions to the Faculty Manual and will continue to do so. *Please see the attached Appendix.*

**The most effective tool we have today is the vaccine.** We have launched a VAX UP campaign to encourage everyone on campus to get vaccinated. Dr. Ginny Webb has scheduled an online workshop with Dr. Jane Kelly, an epidemiologist with SC DHEC. I strongly encourage you to attend the August 26 workshop if you have any questions about the efficacy of the vaccines. We will invite students to do the same. *Information is attached.*

Mary Bucher, assistant to the Chancellor for Public Health, is working with leaders across campus to implement our VAX UP campaign. The campaign is geared toward students and addressing their

concerns around vaccines. Additionally, detailed information regarding health and safety protocols has been sent to students. All updates may be found on [dedicated pages on the university website](#).

This is the first of what will be a series of social media messages:



If you did not have an opportunity to join us last week, a [recording of the event](#) is available. We are committed to communicating with you in as many ways as possible and will continue to utilize the latest technologies to help us accomplish this.

Again, we are working to keep pace with this rapidly-evolving pandemic. Please refer to the university's website for the most [current information and archived communications](#).

We can do this. Together.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bennie L. Harris'.

Bennie L. Harris  
Chancellor

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**Up is where we live.**