RESOLUTION ON FALL 2021 REPOPULATION CONCERNS

Impact on Existing Policy:¹ This resolution revisits and expands upon AS-911-21

WHEREAS, As per our bylaws, the Executive Committee presents this resolution on behalf of the full Academic Senate in the Summer of 2021; and

WHEREAS, AS-911-21, passed by the Academic Senate in Winter 2021, asserted faculty choice of course modality due to COVID-19 through Spring of 2022 because of uncertainties in the state of COVID-19, but was not adopted into policy by the President’s Office; and

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 delta variant in San Luis Obispo County and California is surging in August of 2021, with high hospitalization rates in SLO County comparable to late January 2021; currently, there is a high positivity rate of about 9% in SLO County with only modest fully vaccinated rates of the general population of about 50%; and

WHEREAS, CSU-wide vaccine requirements and local indoor masking mandates are a positive step in enforcing campus safety; and

WHEREAS, Substantive concerns still remain regarding full repopulation into face-to-face instruction for Fall 2021 at Cal Poly including, but not limited to, concerns about: unclear or apparently inflexible faculty virtual options under different contingencies, diluted vaccine efficiency against variants, campus vaccine exemption requests, campus vaccine attestation efficacy, and the lack of vaccines for children under 12; and

WHEREAS, Faculty and administration at Cal Poly have a responsibility to protect the health of our students, faculty, and staff as well as their families; and

WHEREAS, Wide variation in personal and professional circumstances require faculty to have control and flexibility in choosing their teaching modalities under these pandemic conditions; and
WHEREAS, Faculty are committed to providing a high quality and safe learning experience for students independent of modality, including virtual; and

WHEREAS, AS-896-20 permits faculty to teach up to 24% of their face-to-face courses online without special permission; and

WHEREAS, The Fall 2021 Memorandum of Understanding between the Board of Trustees, Cal Poly, and the CFA, item 5 states that faculty teaching preferences shall be among the factors considered when making decisions about teaching modality; therefore be it

RESOLVED: The administration will develop and communicate to the campus community clear policies, procedures, and guidelines for a safe campus repopulation as well as other safety policies in the COVID context as required; and be it

RESOLVED: Any policies and procedures developed to guide repopulation during COVID-19 are fair, equitable, and transparent across the university as well as sensitive to power asymmetries between stakeholders including, but not limited to, relationships between students, lecturers, untenured faculty, tenured faculty of different rank, staff, and administrators; and be it

RESOLVED: Any policies and procedures developed to guide repopulation during COVID-19 are compassionate, mindful of workload considerations, and designed to make the campus experiences as clear, efficient, and flexible as possible for campus stakeholders including chairs, heads, faculty, staff, and students; and be it

RESOLVED: The President and Provost’s Office develop clear and fair policies that empower deans, heads, supervisors, and chairs to work directly with faculty to transition their scheduled teaching modality from face-to-face to virtual if faculty request it prior to the start of Fall 2021; and be it

RESOLVED: To avoid canceling classes, faculty have the ad hoc flexibility to rapidly pivot face-to-face courses temporarily to virtual instruction during necessary acute or dynamic transitory extenuating circumstances such as childcare, elder care, and for physical and/or mental health management; and be it

RESOLVED: Departments and Colleges shall develop and communicate procedures for making virtual transitions during the quarter beyond the threshold for face-to-face permitted by AS-896-20; and be it
RESOLVED: These procedures consider various circumstances and multiple contingencies such as, but not limited to: extended dependent management and mid-quarter local K-12 virtual transitions; and be it

RESOLVED: That no penalties will accrue to faculty transitioning classes under these pandemic conditions, nor will that decision negatively impact their evaluation, promotion, or appointment; and be it

RESOLVED: The administration will comply with AB 685 and faculty will be notified by the university within the legal time period if they experience a direct exposure in their workplace, particularly if a student tests positive for COVID-19 in their classroom; and be it

RESOLVED: If a faculty member has been directly exposed to a COVID-positive person, clear policies and procedures are developed based on current Centers for Disease Control (CDC) time frames for both the COVID-19 incubation period and their recommended quarantine period for positive COVID-19 cases; and be it

RESOLVED: Policies and procedures are developed that clearly inform faculty, students, and staff on how to manage exposure and positive COVID-19 cases, including flexible virtualization options, in different campus contexts such as the classroom, dorm, or office; and be it

RESOLVED: Guidelines and policies are developed by the administration that clearly inform individual faculty absence policies regarding students who miss extended face-to-face instruction while in isolation, quarantine, and/or who test positive for COVID-19 including consideration of withdrawing or taking an incomplete; and be it

RESOLVED: Faculty, in consultation with chairs, deans, and the university administration, shall have a course absence policy clearly articulated in their syllabus, including consideration of allowing students to withdraw or take an incomplete in the course while we are in a COVID-19 pandemic; and be it

RESOLVED: The administration shall have a zero-tolerance policy regarding faculty, staff, and students who deliberately hide their positive COVID-19 status and willfully endanger the health of other faculty, staff, and students; and be it

RESOLVED: The administration collect and verify up-to-date vaccination attestation and exemption documentation for faculty, staff, and students; and be it
RESOLVED: The administration continue to strongly message to the campus community a zero-tolerance policy for falsely attesting vaccination status or providing forged documentation; and be it

RESOLVED: The administration continue to actively communicate and enforce indoor mask mandates to the campus community; and be it

RESOLVED: The administration shall provide faculty, students, and staff with clear procedures, the necessary resources, appropriate authority, and active support to safely enforce mask mandates, with substantive disciplinary elements if required; and be it

RESOLVED: The faculty, staff, students, and administration work together in partnership to support each other in creating a safe learning, teaching, and working environment for the campus community during these difficult times.

Proposed by: Academic Senate Executive Committee
Date: August 30, 2021

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i (1) Describe how this resolution impacts existing policy on educational matters that affect the faculty. Examples include curricula, academic personnel policies, and academic standards.
(2) Indicate if this resolution supersedes or rescinds current resolutions.
(3) If there is no impact on existing policy, please indicate NONE.
MEMORANDUM

To: Thomas Gutierrez
   Chair, Academic Senate

From: Jeffery D. Armstrong
      President

Date: September 2, 2021

Copies: Cynthia Jackson-Elmoore
         Al Liddicoat
         Amy Fleischer
         Andy Thulin
         Damon Fleming
         Bruno Giberti
         Christine Theodoropoulos
         Dean Wendt
         Jessica Darin
         Kathryn Rummell
         Philip Williams

Subject: Response to AS-925-21 Resolution on Fall 2021 Repopulation Concerns

By way of this memo, I acknowledge the above-entitled Academic Senate resolution and thank the Executive Committee for their attention to these matters.

I cannot approve or accept the above-entitled resolution as written.

Keeping students, staff and faculty safe, a core component of the resolution, remains a key focus for Cal Poly. It is essential that we continue to work together to ensure our campus community is safe and that we continue to move forward.

As we prepare for the start of fall quarter, it is important to acknowledge that many in our campus community have concerns and anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is equally as important to recognize that we must continue to uphold our mission of providing a quality education for our students while also ensuring the health and wellbeing of our campus community.

The collective work represented by the efforts of EOC, Academic Affairs, HR/AP, and all components of the campus, as well as the repopulation plans (https://afd.calpoly.edu/hr/return-to-work) that were developed thus far provide policies and procedures that are dynamic and responsive to the changing conditions. The input and ongoing dialogue will continue to inform the fall quarter repopulation.
In addition, the Deans are preparing and sending clarifying guidance to the Chairs and Heads. As has always been the case, faculty are encouraged to work closely with their department heads/chairs and college deans concerning teaching assignments.
Resolution on Fall 2021 Repopulation Concerns  
Cal Poly Academic Senate, August 2021

Preamble
This is a document cataloging lessons, insights, and recommendations learned by faculty teaching during the Q+ in-person experience in the Summer of 2021 at Cal Poly prior to full campus repopulation in the Fall of 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is particularly relevant to the resolved clauses pertaining to COVID-19 exposure and reporting in the classroom. It is included so it might provide a roadmap for collaborative guidance between the administration and faculty. It was prepared by Professors John Patrick and Martin Mehl from the Communications Studies Department and presented to members of HR, AP, and the EOC in August 2021.

Q+ COVID-19 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION & OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE LESSONS LEARNED

We appreciate, acknowledge, and recognize that the university team has been responsively adapting to the needs and first-hand experiences of faculty in the classroom, and that some of these recommendations may have become redundant as the university adapts to the unfolding situation. This is a working document. Its goal is to provide a business use case of strategic communication flow, analyzing the Q+ operational logistics as a case study for the university strategic communication flow. It may evolve in response to new information as it emerges and the dynamic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic. This document first forwards recommendations for policy improvement and then applies the recommendations to the Quarter Plus case study as proof of concept.

Communication Recommendations

1. Openly and transparently meet AB685 requirements. When reporting out to students, staff, and faculty about confirmed cases of COVID-19 the following language makes clear that reporting was done in compliance with the regulation, putting to rest any emergent rumor that the university is out of compliance:

   NOTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL WORKPLACE EXPOSURE TO COVID-19 pursuant to AB685, California Labor Code § 6409.6. An exposure investigation has been completed. Cal Poly SLO received notice on DATE and TIME that a Student infected with COVID-19 was present at the below listed location(s)/class on campus during the period of August 16th 2021: LOCATION(S)

2. The actors responsible for ensuring AB685 compliance and the procedures for doing so need to be clear and transparent. Clearly identifying who is responsible for reporting out to affected stakeholders and the standards for how and when to report to out to them should be made a priority to reduce confusion.

3. When possible, reporting to affected stakeholders prior to AB685 requirements is the best practice. The sooner an official empowered to speak for the university is in contact with those have been exposed to COVID-19, the less likely it is that the university will lose control of the narrative to the rumor mill. The sooner the university controls the
narrative, the less likely the university is to be harmed by rumors, innuendo, and speculation.

4. **Stakeholders who have been identified as possibly having been exposed to a confirmed case should immediately be provided with a list of actions to take.** These actions should be designed to restore a sense of agency for people who believe they have been exposed to an existential threat to their health and wellbeing. Asking frightened people to take no action exacerbates their anxiety, fear, anger, and cognitive dissonance, and increases the chance they will become noncompliant with university guidance and policy. Strong and present leadership is best.

5. **First-contact crisis communication must meet both emotional and informational needs.** When sending a team to address a portion of the campus community that has been exposed to COVID-19, the team must be fully aware of the circumstances that lead to the potential exposure and the policies that govern faculty, staff, and student responses. They should be familiar enough with the situation to know and/or predict what questions and concerns will arise. The team should begin contact by first acknowledging the negative emotions stoked by being exposed to COVID-19. After emotions are acknowledged, they should make efforts to restore community bonds and relationships between stakeholders and the university. Once positive relationships are restored, they should have policy-based answers to policy-based questions about how stakeholders are to comply with university guidance and policy. University representatives should be in the right role to answer important questions, be equipped to get answers for unexpected questions, and present a timeline for when they will have those answers.

6. **Web sites, memos, and emails are unreliable, especially regarding regularly changing pandemic protocols.** The number of emails stakeholders receive from the institution is voluminous. Many stakeholders work at or are members of multiple institutions, which compounds their email burden. An email about policy changes can go unattended to or missed altogether. The university should assume nearly all adjuncts are especially burdened with email responsibilities. Web sites, memos, and emails require active audience participation and often contradict each other in ongoing ways. The university needs to look for more passive and consistent ways to reach everyone on campus with the correct messaging. Posters describing COVID-19 policies and infographics should be clearly displayed at the front of every active classroom, restrooms, in areas where students eat and congregate, and in the halls. When possible, audio and video messages are helpful when played on loops where people congregate.

7. **Advisement on best practices and protocols is badly needed when community members may have been exposed to COVID-19.** These should not be merely housed on a Web site, and they should never self-contradict. They should be included with AB685 reporting and include, but are not necessarily limited to:
   a. Student-oriented communication.
      i. Templates for how to address peers one may have exposed to COVID-19.
ii. Where to get tested if one has possibly been exposed.
iii. Which rapid self-tests are recommended by the university and which are not.
iv. How and where to access resources.
v. Proper personal conduct in the wake of exposure.
vi. Reminder of proper personal screening pass protocols.

b. Faculty- and Staff-oriented communication.
i. Where to get tested if one has possibly been exposed.
ii. Which rapid self-tests are recommended by the university and which are not.
iii. A clear timeline demonstrating the university’s compliance with AB685.
iv. Directives for conducting class and office work, including but not limited to:
   1. Templates for how to address students who have been exposed to COVID-19.
   3. Timelines for communicating with students.
   4. Best practices for being inclusive of quarantined students.
   5. Best practices for maintaining academic standards and rigor when complying with policies that may require a class-wide quarantine.
   6. Best practices for when and how to switch modalities after an exposure, with an eye toward inclusivity of underprivileged students.
   7. Best practices for reintegrating students into the classroom post quarantine.
   8. Legal guidance to help faculty and staff limit liability for both the university and themselves.
v. Assurances that the university will be working with exposed employees to get through the situation.
vi. An organization chart with points of contact for health management, crisis management, and campus wide communication.

Health Policy Recommendations

1. **Students, faculty, and staff who have been identified as possibly exposed to a confirmed case should immediately be eligible for testing at the campus health center regardless of whether they are symptomatic.** This recommendation seems to have already been implemented in the wake of this incident. The university deserves to be commended for making the responsible decision to facilitate testing for everyone who is exposed at Cal Poly.

2. **The university should adopt transparent, health-based criteria for who is prioritized to execute online classes.** The following stakeholder categories are recommended for prioritization:
   a. Immunocompromised faculty.
b. Faculty with children under 12 who, as of yet, are unable to be vaccinated. Assuming a vaccine is approved for use in children, ample time should be provided for them to vaccinate their children before needing to return in person.
c. Faculty who have immunocompromised household members.
d. Faculty who are caretakers for immunocompromised family members.
e. Faculty who are, for medical reasons, unable to be vaccinated.
f. Faculty who are in regular contact with other at-risk humans.

Case Study
When recruited for Q+, faculty were told that Q+ instruction would be face-to-face. As the summer progressed and more information became available about the Delta Variant, several faculty members expressed concern and/or discomfort with face-to-face teaching by contacting administrators either directly or through Vince Merserko, the COMS faculty coordinator. On July 30, Q+ received this message from Dr. Merserko:

Hello COMS 101 Q+ instructors,

A few of you have expressed concerns about in-person teaching during Q+ as a result of the spreading Delta variant. I thought I would share with you this response from Dianna Previs, Director of Programming for Extended Education:

Thanks so much for sharing your concerns with us. I have forwarded your questions to the provost's office to be sure we get the answers correct and to make sure the issues get the attention at the top. I will respond to you as soon as I hear back.

A few things that I would say in general are that as far as speeches go, there should be enough room in the class so that any individual giving a speech would have adequate space at the front of the room to be properly socially distanced to remove their mask during their presentation so as to be heard and allow for viewing of social cues. Another thing is that, especially given the season, all doors and windows can be open to allow for maximum ventilation.

Other options to think about in your lesson planning are small group work that could take place outside of the classroom (whether outside on the lawns or in the study areas of the residence halls), assigning some speeches to be recorded and turned in/viewed online by the class, or even taking the class outdoors for some lecture sessions. You are free to mix it up and in fact, we encourage it to keep things lively.

Finally, in general, while I don't think you will be allowed to ask individual students their vaccination status per se, nothing prevents you from talking about your own situation and desire to protect your children and high-risk family members. By doing so you could appeal to any unvaccinated student to get vaccinated in order to protect others (there will be vaccinations available on campus) or socially distance/wear masks in the classroom. This could prove to be a powerful life lesson.
That said, we will do everything possible to answer your questions and adjust where necessary to ensure everyone’s safety and well-being during Quarter Plus.

More to come...

If any others of you are feeling hesitant about in-person teaching, please let me know by the end of the weekend, and I will share your concerns with Program Coordinator Eileen Akin.

When Q+ was planned, information about the Delta Variant was emerging, and it’s transmissibility among vaccinated persons was not yet known. On July 30, the CDC released a report which included the following data:

During July 2021, 469 cases of COVID-19 associated with multiple summer events and large public gatherings in a town in Barnstable County, Massachusetts, were identified among Massachusetts residents; vaccination coverage among eligible Massachusetts residents was 69%. Approximately three quarters (346; 74%) of cases occurred in fully vaccinated persons (those who had completed a 2-dose course of mRNA vaccine [Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna] or had received a single dose of Janssen [Johnson & Johnson] vaccine ≥14 days before exposure). Genomic sequencing of specimens from 133 patients identified the B.1.617.2 (Delta) variant of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in 119 (89%) and the Delta AY.3 sublineage in one (1%). Overall, 274 (79%) vaccinated patients with breakthrough infection were symptomatic. (https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm)

Q+ neared as transmissibility of the Delta variant becoming more well-understood, and faculty learned that some virtual courses were being offered despite previously being told instruction would be face-to-face. There was a lack of transparency as to how the university determined which instructors would be allowed to teach online and this created a sense of frustration in faculty who believed they had legitimate claims to virtual instruction. Using the criteria offered under Health Policy Recommendations, Section 2, to prioritize faculty for online teaching would have eliminated perceptions that the process was unclear, unfair, and/or uncaring of faculty’s concerns, and the decisions would have been easily justified.

Throughout the first two days of class, August 12 and 13, no hand sanitizer was provided in many, possibly all, classrooms, and there was no readily observable evidence of sanitization measures taken in the classrooms. Stakeholders were erroneously told that the social distancing measures in classrooms would allow students remove their masks while speaking at the front of class. This continued until August 16, when Q+ sent the following message to faculty:

Dear Quarter Plus residential faculty:
I’m touching base this evening to let you know that the campus policy on masking has recently been clarified and students, faculty, staff, and all campus visitors must wear face coverings at all times while indoors. This requirement was announced in the president’s message “Updates on Fall Plans” on August 9, available for review on the Campus Updates page.

The requirement to wear a face covering applies to students and faculty while in the classroom, including when they are lecturing and giving speeches. Information about relaxing these rules when socially distanced was given in error.

We do encourage you to be creative during this time and consider making use of outdoor spaces and/or virtual assignments.

Additional information can be found on the Face Covering Requirements for Campus Activity webpage listed below.

https://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/stay-healthy

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions,

Application of Communication Recommendations, Section 6, would have made these errors highly unlikely through the use of ubiquitous messaging regarding policy compliance.

On Monday, August 16, three days into the Q+ term, stakeholders heard rumors that they had been exposed to COVID-19. There was no official communication from the university until August 18, when Communication Studies chair Grace Yeh forwarding a university memo stating:

NOTIFICATION OF POTENTIAL WORKPLACE EXPOSURE TO COVID-19 pursuant to AB685, California Labor Code § 6409.6. An exposure investigation has been completed. Cal Poly SLO received notice that a Student infected with COVID-19 was present at the below listed location(s)/class on campus during the period of August 16th 2021: Construction Innovations 186C/202

If you were present at the same worksite during this period, you may or may not have been exposed to the virus. No action is required on your part. Instructors should notify their classes of a potential exposure, keeping confidential the positive student’s identity. Public Health contact traces will be making any appropriate contacts.

All COVID-19 protocols are being followed including social distancing, face covering use, de-densifying building occupancy and disinfection. The building is properly cleaned on a regular basis. Public Health contact tracers will reach out to individuals known to have interacted with this person. If you are not contacted, there is no specific action needed. Individuals who have accessed these areas on or around the dates indicated are advised to monitor their health for COVID-19 symptoms and follow up with their healthcare provider if they experience symptoms. If you are exhibiting symptoms, have been in close contact with a person who has tested positive for COVID-19, or believe you may be
infected, contact your health provider and your department manager. Do not go to work. A close contact is defined as: Being within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more total, during a 24-hour cumulative period, with a person who tested positive for COVID-19. As a Cal Poly employee, you may be entitled to various benefits under applicable Federal and State laws and/or University-specific policies and agreements. COVID-19 testing sites are available throughout San Luis Obispo County. An appointment may be necessary. Med Stop also does COVID-19 testing. Campus testing is available at specific times and locations. All community members are advised to take precautions recommended by the CDC and the local Public Health Department. If you test positive for the virus, please notify your manager, HR representative or Kathryn Villarreal EH&S 756-5427 immediately as there are regulatory steps that need to be followed and are in place to help keep campus community safe. For further Campus COVID-19 information you can review the web page https://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/
For information of benefits and leaves contact HR https://afd.calpoly.edu/hr/employee-resources/leave-programs/COVID-19-leave
For information on Workers’ Compensation contact Kathryn Villarreal, https://afd.calpoly.edu/workers-comp/
If you believe you contracted COVID-19 as a result of your employment, you may be entitled to these benefits.
Kathryn Villareal, Workers’ Compensation Analyst, COVID-19 POC/Coordinator, Environmental Health & Safety

Application of Communication Recommendations, Sections 1 through 4 and 7, would have clarified this message, removing self-contradictory or unclear content, and ensured it came from an appropriate party, restored a sense of personal agency to stakeholders, likely avoided faculty making ad hoc decisions to take their classes online, and avoided the need for the contentious meeting of August 20.

The previously mentioned contentious meeting of August 20 occurred in a context in which students and faculty were frightened and looking for answers regarding the exposure. Instead the meeting consisted of an overview of measures Cal Poly had taken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. When pressed on questions about policy, protocol, and procedures, the representatives indicated that they were unfamiliar with the August 16 positive test, that they did not know when the test was reported, and were unable to provide documentation demonstrating that the university was compliant with AB685. The meeting also did not provide clear guidance regarding whether to return to holding class in person, or how to address the issue with students. The meeting ended abruptly, leaving questions unanswered and best practices unclear. Application of Communication Recommendations, Section 6, would likely have resulted in a more positive and productive meeting.

Throughout the timeline, staff, faculty, and students exhibited a frustration with unclear mixed messages and lack of critical knowledge of policy. When one instructor used the native polling
feature in Zoom to poll their class, 100% of students indicated they had not received official notice of exposure to COVID-19 from the university. Additionally, 50% of students reported they were not aware of how or where to get tested in response to exposure. On the Cal Poly COVID Dashboard Web page it instructs asymptomatic students exposed to COVID-19 to go to Campus Health and Wellbeing to get tested. However, if one follows the link directing one to “More Information” regarding student testing, the official Web page for student testing information instructs “Anyone needing asymptomatic testing should look to community resources; see the ‘Off-Campus Testing Resources’ section of the COVID-19 testing page.” Faculty were told they could lead activities outside the classroom, but at least one was admonished for doing so. Application of Communication Recommendations, Section 6, would have made these errors and contradictory information highly unlikely through the use of ubiquitous messaging regarding policy awareness and compliance.

It appears that by August 23, the university had also arrived at several of these conclusions and had begun implementing policies and practices that reflect similar principles. We commend the team for their work on this and look forward to seeing our community well-served by these adaptations. The ongoing challenge is continued growth together during these trying and challenging times when everyone involved wants to serve the community of learners. When the community is panicked, a more streamlined communication flow serves to calm and empower people.

Additional Resources

UC TASKFORCE

DELTA VARIANT IMPACT HEALTH GUIDANCE
SARS-CoV-2 testing strategies to contain school-associated transmission: model-based analysis of impact and cost of diagnostic testing, screening, and surveillance.

PUBLIC AWARENESS
https://time.com/6087815/covid-delta-schools-reopening/
https://www.healthline.com/health-news/heres-how-well-covid-19-vaccines-work-against-the-delta-variant#Vaccines-vs.-Delta-variant

CONTACT TRACING
https://canotify.ca.gov/
https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19-Contact-Tracing.aspx
https://calstate.policystat.com/policy/8521820/latest/

CAL POLY COVID-19 INFORMATION AND NOTIFICATION GUIDELINES
https://afd.calpoly.edu/hr/covid-reporting.php
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https://www.calpoly.edu/roadmap/faculty-and-staff
https://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/student-testing
https://coronavirus.calpoly.edu/dashboard