

## **General faculty meeting address, Clemson University**

**August 16, 2021**

### **Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees**

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This is my first time addressing the faculty as your faculty representative to the board of trustees. This position is part of the shared governance of the University. “Shared governance requires transparency, communication and accountability at all levels of decision-making within the University.” In the short time that I have held this position, I’ve gained a better appreciation of the multitude of activities and programs needed to keep our university running. While I know many of you are concerned with the plans starting in person classes on Wednesday, particularly the lack of a mask mandate, I can assure you that there are several activities going on behind the scenes to ensure the safety of the faculty, students and staff while staying within the restrictions being imposed on us by the state legislature. I know this is a stressful experience for all and now adding on that many of you will have your children at home due to the local schools going online, it’s time to find ways to work through this.

Unfortunately, South Carolina is one of eight states in the country that has passed a law against a mask mandate. In order for this to change, the General Assembly must reconsider the provision.

Thankfully, our legislative team and others were able to defeat a similar proviso forbidding a testing mandate. Thus, our robust testing system is still in place. Keep in mind this is one of the most robust testing, isolation, and quarantine programs in the country. The program served us well during the virus surge last year and is now in an even more robust form for the coming surge from the delta variant.

Let’s consider the restrictions by the governor and general assembly for a moment. States rights has different meanings for different people. But let me take it at the core concept of an individual or group of individuals rights to be independent and choose for themselves. In an astounding display of hypocrisy, Governor McMaster is limiting our ability to choose the best path forward for ourselves.

So it is clear that the leadership at the state level has failed us. As a state institution, we must abide by the state mandates. However, as the premier institution of higher learning in the state, it is time for us to lead by example. We cannot require vaccinations due to ethical concerns, but we can inform our students and each other of the science behind the vaccines. While we cannot mandate mask wearing due to state law. But we can lead by example. That includes wearing masks ourselves, explaining the benefits of wearing masks to our students, and making sure that any social media posts or announcements from Clemson show the students, faculty, and staff wearing masks.

Also remind everyone that testing, isolation, and quarantine are our best tools to get through this and that we have free testing available. The requirements from the university are the minimum requirement but you can get tested as frequently as you like.

I know I am asking a lot from you. But we can be the leaders now and show the students and our community how to get through this. We are in this together. The Provost has provided guidance to the Deans and Department Chairs to help navigate the first few weeks of the semester as the surge passes. I implore you to consider those recommendations. If you personally have relatively low risk, please help out your colleagues that may have higher risk and/or unvaccinated children at home. If you are at high risk and cannot find appropriate accommodations, per the Provost's recommendations and in consultation with your department chair or school director, modify your classes and teaching approaches in ways that will remove your risk or solve your immediate challenge.

While your concerns about the lack of a mask mandate have dominated the comments I have received the last few weeks, I have also heard many concerns over the announcement that unclassified faculty were not included in the 2.5% base salary increase that classified staff received but instead will be eligible for merit based performance increases. I have been discussing this program with representatives from the Provost's office and aim to provide some clarification and details that I will pass through the faculty senate.

I wish you well in the coming semester and I welcome your comments, questions, and concerns.