

To the the members of the Legislative Commission:

As a UNLV professor, I am writing to express my concern that COVID vaccination mandates at UNLV may be allowed to expire or be abandoned.

As omicron is demonstrating, this pandemic is nowhere close to being over. Vaccination and mask wearing are our best defense against this ongoing public health disaster. This is a scientific fact. I have a PhD in Geophysics. My scientific training and years of work as a research scientist and science teacher have provided me with lots of practice in the logical evaluation of various claims. The claims of those who advocate against these straightforward health measures don't make sense from a public health perspective, or personal health perspective and their claims regarding their "personal rights" are inconsistent with historic precedents in the United States.

Judging by record enrollment numbers for spring semester in my Department's courses, there is no evidence that students object to being vaccinated or are dropping out of school on account of the mandate. I have not met a single student who has expressed resistance to being vaccinated or wearing face masks.

I have been vastly relieved that my students will be vaccinated next semester allowing me to go back to small group work. What I learned from on-line teaching is that in-person instruction is vastly better. Students learn from each other almost as much as they learn from the professor, because as they explain the material to each other they engage with it in a way that is different from passively listening to me lecture. Having the students working remotely or sitting at separate tables interferes with this peer teaching.

Finally I must say that loosening of COVID measures would be immensely demoralizing for the faculty. During that pandemic the University system has asked the faculty to do much more work for lowered compensation (the furlough in 2020). Teaching on line takes more than twice the time of teaching in person and just developing the materials for an online course for the first time takes in excess of 15 hours a week. This additional work load was not compensated for by fewer classes or lowered research expectations. The faculty have just postponed their vacations, personal lives and sleep to get the job done. I have never felt "burn-out" before, but I can tell you I am burned out. Having the University system turn its back on my health would feel like the last straw. Good faculty are really important for the University's success. We are also highly talented in our disciplines and have connections with other institutions and industry.

Many other Universities across the country have had no problem requiring their students to be vaccinated. Why should faculty stay true to a University that doesn't treat us as well as our peers elsewhere?

In summary, I strongly urge the Legislative Commission to approve the permanent COVID vaccine mandate.

Best Regards,

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