

MOTION TO APPROVE
FAILED

RS.22.01
October 18, 2021

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
PRE-FILED RESOLUTION
(Final; Action)

RS.22.01 Resolution to Review Policies on Classroom Contact Tracing

WHEREAS the University of Illinois has established itself as a world leader in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic in educational settings—in part through its development of a saliva test for COVID-19 and its use of the Safer Illinois App to monitor building access and help with contact tracing; and

WHEREAS the University of Illinois has been able to return to in-person teaching in part due to the extremely high levels of vaccination within its populations; and

WHEREAS effective contact tracing has been an integral part of the line of defense that the University of Illinois has been using in its past reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic and is viewed by most epidemiologists as an important ingredient to a successful response; and

WHEREAS COVID-19 and the Delta variant remain serious threats to public health today in our region and throughout the world and other variants are likely to emerge and make continued contact tracing an important part of the University of Illinois’s response to COVID-19 for years to come; and

WHEREAS at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, as part of the “new normal” for in-person teaching, in-person instructors play—and will continue to play—an important role in enforcing various COVID-19 protocols and enhancing the safety and health of the campus community (especially in the classroom and related educational settings); and

WHEREAS in-person instructors are, for example, empowered by the University to check the entry permission status of all the students in the classroom and act upon infractions; and

WHEREAS in-person instructors are also empowered by the University to check the masking of all the students in the classroom and act upon infractions; and

WHEREAS in-person instructors here at UIUC, as front-line personnel with numerous health safety oversight powers as noted above, should also be kept abreast of best practices to expedite effective contact tracing in the classroom and related educational settings; and

WHEREAS some institutions, such as the University of Illinois at Chicago’s School of Public Health,¹ have developed valuable resources for in-person instructors to assist contact tracing in the event of a positive case emerging in their classrooms; and

WHEREAS robust data collection regarding close contacts in classrooms has proven to be of considerable benefit in some educational settings, where it has been used to mitigate the risks of classroom transmission and to assure instructors that all possible measures are being taken to keep classrooms safe; and

WHEREAS the publication of such data, for example about case numbers of possible classroom transmission, may help to ameliorate many fears about classroom safety on the part of instructors and students, as when UIC contact tracers shared data that showed that, in the first four weeks of the Fall 2021 semester, the 90 students who tested positive had been present in a total of 192 classes within the window of their infectiousness but that contact tracers found only one *possible* case of transmission, who was an unvaccinated student;² and

WHEREAS the data collected by UIC contact tracers suggest that classrooms that follow the current classroom masking and building access protocols in place at both UIC and UIUC and have similarly high vaccination rates are currently very safe and that classroom transmission is currently very likely either very low or non-existent at UIUC—even though circumstances may change as the virus evolves and specific data from UIUC could help establish that more clearly;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that in order to build on the University of Illinois’s past record of success, the Academic Senate’s Executive Committee work with the campus administration to form an ad-hoc committee, comprising relevant stakeholders from across the campus to examine current practices and protocols related to data collection and dissemination in regard to contact tracing in the classroom and related educational settings;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, more specifically, the ad-hoc committee consider both the CDC’s guidelines for IHEs (institutions of higher education) regarding “policies and procedures to support expedited determination of exposure risk and close contacts”³ as well as the practices of other IHE’s related to contact tracing in the classroom and other educational

¹ <https://publichealth.uic.edu/uic-covid-19-public-health-response/uic-covid-19-contact-tracing-and-epidemiology-program/>. UIC’s School of Public Health does all contact tracing for students, staff, and faculty, except for the UIC hospital system which does its own contact tracing. Other universities also have on-campus or “indigenous” contact tracing programs: Yale (<https://covid19.yale.edu/health-guidelines/yale-covid-19-contact-tracing-program>), Brown (<https://healthy.brown.edu/testing-tracing/contact-tracing>), Emory (https://studenthealth.emory.edu/other/COVID/ContactTracing_COVID.html), George Washington (<https://coronavirus.gwu.edu/isolation-tracing#tracing>), Johns Hopkins (<https://covidinfo.jhu.edu/diagnostic-testing/johns-hopkins-covid-19-call-center/>), and University of Washington (<https://www.ehs.washington.edu/covid-19-prevention-and-response/covid-19-case-response>), among others.

² <https://today.uic.edu/uic-classroom-public-health-guidance-for-faculty>; italicization is part of the original text.

³ https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/contact-tracing.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fcolleges-universities%2Fcontact-tracing.html

settings in order to recommend steps that are judged to be both beneficial and feasible in the specific UIUC context that instructors can take to help contact tracers quickly and effectively identify potential close contacts in their classrooms⁴;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee should explore whether and how anonymized information about every case where a student has tested positive should be maintained in a secure campus database, in which course-related data is collected, including all contact tracing and other risk mitigation steps that may have been taken in each class, for possible use in evaluating the success of these steps and for developing long term risk mitigation strategies to improve the health and safety of our classrooms and related educational settings during the ongoing pandemic, and for providing the university community with regular updates of relevant classroom contact tracing metrics;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the committee should report on its findings and recommendations to the Academic Senate, ideally before the end of Fall term but no later than the first Senate meeting of Spring term, for discussion.

Presented by Bruce Rosenstock, Senator, Religion, LAS

⁴ For example, in an August 27, 2021 mailing to all instructors, UIC Provost Javier Reyes reported the following steps, suggested by their contact tracing team, that instructors could take:

- Assign seating to all students in your classrooms, or assign students to three- or four-person “pods” that will always sit together in specific sections of the classroom;
- Keep a record of assigned seats with student names and UIN, or the names and UINs of members of the “pod” and their location in the classroom;
- If these steps prove onerous or are otherwise not feasible, ask students to learn the names of the students sitting near them, keep a record for themselves and, if this information changes frequently, submit this information to the instructor at the end of each class;
- In lieu of any of these steps, encourage students to get acquainted with the students they regularly interact with in the classroom;
- Call on students by name, a practice that can foster community building in addition to allowing students to learn the names of the people sitting next to them

(https://today.uic.edu/contact-tracing-and-seating-assignments?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=provost%2Bofficial%2B08.27.21)