

January 7, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

Following [Dr. Munson's latest communication](#), I am writing with important information about the start of the spring semester in Academic Affairs. As you know, the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 virus is prevalent in our region, in New York State, and across the country. Omicron is more contagious than prior variants but is also less likely to cause severe illness, particularly among those who are vaccinated. Dr. Munson and the senior leadership team is continually monitoring the situation and will adjust as necessary. Nevertheless, I know there are questions and anxiety about this latest phase of the pandemic. Please review the information below as you prepare to return to campus.

- RIT will start classes on January 10 as scheduled and we will follow our established course schedule. There are no plans at this time for the university to move to online classes. Our campus community is fully vaccinated, [boosters are now required](#), and we will continue the mask mandate for everyone circulating on campus.
- Given that the situation is evolving quickly, we should all be prepared to make temporary pivots to online learning. In particular, please give thought to how you would handle your classes or work responsibilities in the event we had to move online during the month of January.
- Ordinarily faculty are able to lecture unmasked behind a Plexiglas shield. For the first week of classes, faculty should remain masked. I will review this requirement regularly and will return to last year's approach as quickly as possible.
- Omicron's presence in our area means we will likely see more positive tests among students, faculty, and staff. Anyone who feels ill, tests positive for COVID-19, or receives a quarantine order should stay home, which may increase absences across our entire community. Maintaining services and academic continuity during this period will require an additional degree of flexibility on all our parts.
  - Any employee who tests positive for COVID-19 or believes they have been exposed must report that to RIT following the instructions at this [link](#).
  - For faculty, [Policy E04.0 – Faculty Employment Policy](#), section IV.C., outlines the process to follow when they cannot meet their classes due to illness or quarantine.
    - If a faculty member is ill and unable to meet the class, it is the faculty member's responsibility to notify the students in the class and ensure that the class's planned learning outcomes are still met. Ill faculty members should also notify their department chair.
    - If a faculty member has been exposed to or diagnosed with COVID-19 and can conduct class in an online modality, students should be notified that the class is temporarily moving to an online modality; the department chair must also be informed.
    - If, after one week (7 consecutive calendar days), the faculty member is unable to meet the class and resume instruction in the scheduled modality (i.e., modality published in the schedule of courses), the faculty member should notify their department chair and Human Resources since an illness of greater than seven days can trigger short term disability.

- For staff, please follow the established [process for reporting absences](#) outlined on the HR website. For information about COVID-related absences, please [click here](#).
- Students who are ill or in quarantine/isolation should not be in class. The deans and I encourage faculty to be as flexible as possible in helping these students maintain academic continuity. While it is not expected that faculty change the modality of their courses, providing flexibility to students will help keep our community safer. For more information on options for maintaining academic continuity, please click [here](#).
- We will maintain the same staff flexible work arrangements (FWAs) that were approved for fall semester. For most staff support units, this means a 4/1 schedule. Please be in touch with your supervisor if circumstances occur that require a change to your schedule.
- If a faculty or staff member feels that they need a COVID-related accommodation under ADA guidelines, i.e. you are immunocompromised or you are a caregiver for an immunocompromised person, please follow the process for requesting an accommodation found [here](#).

January looks to be a challenging month, and I appreciate your flexibility as we work through this next stage of the pandemic. Given the fluidity of this situation, I understand the need for more frequent communication. There is a scheduled Provost's Office Hour on Monday, January 10, at 1 p.m. Additional office hours will be scheduled throughout this month. Written updates will go out as new information becomes available. I encourage you to review the updated guidelines in the [RIT Safety Plan](#); remember that this is a "living document" and will continue to be updated as needed. The [RIT Ready](#) website also has been updated and includes new "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" that are updated regularly. As always, I welcome your questions and concerns. Please feel free to send them to me via the Office of the Provost email – [provost@rit.edu](mailto:provost@rit.edu).

Sincerely,

Ellen Granberg, Ph.D.  
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs