

## **Dear UNK Leadership,**

UNKEA and UNK's Faculty Senate want to express concerns with UNK's readiness for re-opening in only two weeks. This is especially alarming in light of evidence that the virus is increasing its spread in our region. In our latest survey of union members who were asked if they felt safe returning to campus, 80% said "no" (Aug. 5, 2020).

As of August 6, 2020, the Two Rivers District classified our region as being at "elevated risk," at which point they advise us to "Stay at home unless traveling for work, medical care, or food," "Work from home if possible," and reduce spatial interaction to the "Smallest number of contacts feasible."

In both the Central Health District and the Two Rivers Health District positivity rates have been increasing, with Two Rivers reporting a 14.35% positivity rate for the week of July 22-29<sup>th</sup>. This is far beyond the 5% threshold that school leaders across the country are using as a guide to determine whether they should re-open or not. This increase has been reflected at UNK with at least 23 COVID-19 positive cases within the football program alone. We have reached this number with only two weeks before the semester begins, and we are not ready.

As of today, the installation of hand sanitizers across campus and UV lighting in certain classrooms/studios, as well as the organization of seating in some classrooms, have not been completed. At one time there was an expectation that faculty would be tested before the Fall, only to see this idea fall through. We have been informed about the use of a testing machine, but as of today we have no idea when members of the UNK community will have access to it. Finally, we lack clarity as to when UNK's App for reporting COVID-19 symptoms will be available.

UNK still lacks any centralized effort to enforce social distancing or mask wearing, as our respective communities are expected to embrace a cultural change associated with the pandemic. Unfortunately, since July 17<sup>th</sup>, UNKEA has received reports of staff, faculty, students, and members of the cabinet walking into offices and in buildings without masks. Immense weight is being placed upon individual adherence to guidelines: "self-monitoring" and "self-reporting" of symptoms, and the "self-enforcing" of behaviors necessary to mitigate the spread of the virus. Given the politicization of the virus, we fear the divide that has already developed will prevent the levels of compliance needed to keep faculty, staff, students, and by extension the Kearney community, safe. There is already evidence that this is happening.

While we understand that the COVID risk for our students varies from that of older adults, there is still risk. We are doubtful that we have the time to reopen our campus and guarantee that students will be safe from COVID—or of being certain that students who are asymptomatic carriers of the virus will not bring back the virus to vulnerable family members. In addition to our students, there is a very real possibility that members of UNK's staff and faculty will become seriously ill with the reopening in the Fall.

The healthiest course of action is to delay the reopening of our campus until Two Rivers Health District classifies our district as firmly in the green range (low risk, with minimal cases of COVID in the community) on the COVID risk dial, or until we have 14 days with no new cases. In the meantime, students can be served in a remote learning environment while we await greater community mitigation of the virus to reopen our campuses.

Barring such a delay we respectfully request that the following steps be taken to better ensure that we can do our jobs and educate our students safely, while also making progress in reducing the spread of the virus:

--That UNK present a specific set of conditions that clarify not only when our campus will loosen restrictions, but even more importantly, when our campus must return to 100% remote learning.

-All faculty and staff who can reasonably conduct their work from home should be allowed to make that choice without requiring a disability accommodation or the approval of their supervisor;

**-That the number of completed tests and positive cases within our respective campus community (faculty, staff and students) must be regularly (weekly or bi-weekly) and publicly updated to ensure that we all have an understanding of our progress (or lack thereof) in mitigating the virus (see a successful model at [Missouri State](#)). It serves no one's interest for information about the number of positive cases to first be reported to the media before the campus community (such as the [23 cases](#) among our football team). In fact, this only breeds distrust and allows rumor and fear to influence community behavior.**

-That the promised protections, including hand sanitizer dispensers, plexiglass shields, PPE, UV lighting and exhaust fans be installed, in keeping with UNK's Mitigation plan, before any instructor returns to face-to-face learning;

-That a specific commitment be made to all faculty and staff who are parents that our institution will fully accommodate their transition to remote work in the event that K-12 schools must close due to the spread of the virus;

We seek the implementation of these necessary changes by August 17<sup>th</sup>.

Please understand that UNKEA has a legal obligation to seek a safe and healthy working environment for our members. Both UNKEA and the Faculty Senate have been dedicated to facilitating faculty input and assisting in the development of UNK's COVID mitigation plans. Together, we still feel that there is time for us to work with the administration in making decisions that will be vital to our community's defense against the virus—and that will be of great benefit to our community in the long run.

Sincerely,

Will Avilés, President of UNKEA

Roger Davis, Vice-President

Kim Carlson, Treasurer

Rebecca Nelson, Secretary

Darby Carlson, Membership Chair

Allen Thomas, Chief Negotiator

Julie Lanz, Negotiator

Bill Wozniak, Past President

Martonia Gaskill, Fac.Senate President

Jonathan Dettman, President-Elect

Derek Boeckner, Secretary

Ford Clark, Senate Representative

Dawn Mollenkopf, Parliamentarian