S2022-R1 – Online Learning Options

WHEREAS, The University of North Texas mission statement is, “At the University of North Texas, our caring and creative community empowers our students to thrive in a rapidly changing world.”

WHEREAS, The COVID-19 Pandemic has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the physical and mental health of students, faculty, and staff at the University of North Texas.

WHEREAS, The University of North Texas transitioned to an online learning environment last academic year in order to maintain continuity of education while protecting the physical and mental health of its Student Body.

WHEREAS, The Student Body consists of a diverse population of individuals, whose responses to course modality and crises are just as diverse.

WHEREAS, A petition garnering over 4,500 signatures, created by UNT student Hannah Larson, requests the same of UNT for this semester; of the many comments listed, some have been provided here:

- “I’m pregnant, and was told that it was determined to not be a consideration to needing remote accommodation. Getting covid could increase the risk of preterm labor, stillbirth and complications to my baby as well as making it more difficult for myself to fight off. This is unacceptable to not even offer all classes a remote option…”
- “A lot of students don’t realize that we were charged a discreet $200 distance education fee last year when the University went online. We paid for them to establish infrastructure to offer courses online. We should have the choice to receive the benefit of that infrastructure.”
- “As someone with multiple health conditions, having an online option for my courses would enable me to focus on my studies without worrying about my health every second I am on campus. I have been able to avoid in-person in favor of online courses, but after 2 years of this, I am now at a point where I have no choice. Its either go in person or continue this dance of pushing back my graduation date. It’s 2022, adding an online component is fairly trivial and many colleges have already done so, even well before the pandemic. Make it a choice and have both options. People who did poorly with online
can attend in-person and people who want to stay online can do so without risking their health and continually pushing back finishing their education.”

- “This is my first semester at a university. I transferred from a community college & I was super excited to attend… until i contracted COVID. I was really wanting to get through the whole pandemic without catching it, however, that wasn’t the case. I don’t have any health issues, yet it hit me so hard. I was experiencing all of the possible symptoms & would honestly not even want my worst enemy to go through that. It was Horrible. Now when i go to my classes I’m terrified that the person sitting in the chair before me might’ve had it and is just acting as a carrier. I’m still feeling the after effects and it’s just not great. I am disappointed that our university isn’t concerned enough for the safety of its own staff and students. people seem to be so careless about deaths nowadays. We see that the number of deaths keep rising & yet no one is really phased by it, clearly our university isn’t phased. Even 1 death should be important. yet we’re losing thousands of people daily. I personally don’t want to be one of them or cause someone to be one of them. We need to be safe. First, Second And Last.”

- “Firstly, I am proud to attend UNT and proud to be returning after maternity leave. However, I am disappointed in the lack of online options this semester. As a new mom to a 3-month-old baby, I am terrified of contracting Covid and passing it to our infant son. Of the 9 courses I have remaining before student teaching begins, only 1 was available this semester in online form. I don’t imagine we will ‘be in the clear’ come Fall when I need to return to a full-time schedule in order to finish my degree. More online options should be available for all degree plans. I urge UNT President Neal Smatresk to work diligently to provide more distance learning, and therefore safer, options for all UNT students and faculty alike. Go Mean Green.”

- “Not only are all other students and faculty in jeopardy with the current situation but going home at the end of the day jeopardizes my family, my daughter. Who attends school and could affect the other children, teachers and their families. This is leading to an undeniable snowball effect! If my child comes in contact with someone who tests positive, I, being a single mom must stay home due to her daycare’s protocol and should that happen, I will miss school and could potentially miss a test that my professor said “regardless if I miss because of any COVID circumstance I will receive a zero and cannot make up anything.” - This causes additional stress that could be easily avoided if UNT went back to remote/online learning.”

- “I’m currently attending UNT as a transfer student, I caught COVID-19/delta on campus after the first week of the fall semester 2021. I was completely miserable and was falling behind terribly (was out for 3 weeks) I ended up failing the semester and is now on academic probation for the spring 2022 semester. All due to not having the resources provided by UNT for off campus materials. Most of my teachers did not record there zooms for students. That were missing the classes all due to being sick and passing it around.”
“I’m an immunocompromised/chronically ill student; not being given a choice in attending in-person classes makes me disappointed in this university and its "leadership". My anxiety around COVID physically hurts.”

“my health and safety is more important than in person classes. i contemplated even dropping out of unt and going to another university because of their ignorance towards covid.”

“I’m immunocompromised and this decision to have classes in person with no accessibility options is ableist and discriminatory. Students have had to drop classes or drop out because there are no accommodations made for students who are high-risk. Students are given no choice which is not fair and creates unnecessary barriers to access. This is unsafe for immunocompromised staff and faculty as well. The decision to put $ over lives is selfish and reckless.”

“I am a disabled student at UNT who have 3 autoimmune chronic illnesses. I am at a high risk of getting seriously sick from COVID but I can not take off a semester due to losing scholarships and affecting my graduation plan. UNT is putting their greed about my health and education. Do better.”

WHEREAS, Some professors have allegedly placed undue stress on their students with their conduct in the classroom in the following ways:

- A biology professor reportedly does not wear masks and does not socially distance from students. They reportedly do not offer make-ups for exams missed due to COVID-19 and expects exams to be done in-person, thus incentivizing students to come to class with COVID-19.³

- An immunology professor reportedly said, “I don’t know why we even have to wear these [referring to masks]… I’m only doing it to be a good role model… I’m double vaxxed, boosted, and am currently getting over Omicron.” The professor proceeded to cough into the mic, which disturbed a number of students in the professor’s class.⁴

- A biology professor reportedly taught an in-person class with a mask on their chin while coughing. The professor reportedly admitted that they were suffering from COVID-19 and eventually decided to do an online lecture from their office on campus after potential exposure to the class.⁵

- A professor reportedly said, “turn to your neighbor and give them a dumb ass look. If they’re wearing a mask it’s already a dumb ass look.”⁶

- A professor reportedly put the following statement in their syllabus, citing an old policy on the Dean of Students website: “… your professors have no obligation to make temporary adjustments [for illness, death in the family, etc.]. If they decline to allow adjustments you may need to withdraw from the course, take an Incomplete, or repeat the class in the future.”⁷
WHEREAS, Some professors and staff have been concerned about in-person instruction, or may have been directed to stop online instruction, in the following ways:

- Professor and Denton City Councilperson Armintor stated, “As a UNT prof, I'm concerned for the health of my students, UNT staff, the greater community, my kids, their classmates, and my immunocompromised senior parents. Most students don't have access to the right kinds of masks to protect against Omicron (N95 and KN95), and there's no requirement to wear any kind of mask at all in campus buildings, just a recommendation. That's a recipe for disaster.”
- An untenured faculty member said, “… I am so grateful to you students--I can't speak up for fear of getting fired. You are doing a service to so many of us. Thank you for your leadership and care.”
- A UNT staff member said, “I have been very disappointed in UNT’s response to COVID. The president has praised UNT for its low COVID numbers compared to other schools. However, cases could be even fewer if UNT took more proactive measures instead of being reactive. Students, faculty, and staff need to have more options for remote learning and remote working for the safety of the entire community.”
- A professor reportedly emailed their students saying, “Yes, I am streaming class via Zoom, but only students who have approval through the Dean of Students will receive the passcode to access our Zoom class. I wish everyone good health and hope to see you in class later today.”

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has not been eradicated; in fact, week ending positive cases on January 21st were 449. On the second week of the Fall 2021 semester, cases peaked at 210. On October 29th, 2020, the university was fully online with 363 positive cases since August 7th of that year.

WHEREAS, Students who have indicated being vaccinated on social media have subsequently contracted COVID-19 despite the vaccine.

WHEREAS, Students can receive long-term physical and psychological damage by contracting COVID-19, even in mild cases; a concern which is enhanced for some individuals who are expected to attend classes in-person.

WHEREAS, The barriers to physical class attendance faced by disabled students may be greater than those faced by abled students because of chronic illness, flare ups, hospitalizations, or other unforeseeable circumstances that are part of living as a disabled person.

WHEREAS, Students can face economic and academic hardship due to quarantine.
WHEREAS, While UNT is offering to provide accommodations for students who cannot develop or execute an isolation plan, there are students who are unaware of this accommodation and who are unaware of how to receive this help.

WHEREAS, UNT received a surplus of distance education fees in the last year due to classes being solely online, a fee which exists to “support and enhance instructional design, management, delivery, maintenance, coaching and technology for distance education courses”.

WHEREAS, Professors should have access to the online infrastructure developed last year for online instruction due to distance education fees.

WHEREAS, UNT has established that we have returned to in-person learning and that professors will not be required to offer accommodations or alternatives for those concerned about contracting COVID-19.

WHEREAS, UNT students have reported that upper-level courses did not have online options for registration at the start of the spring semester.

WHEREAS, Students may be utilizing UNT counseling services due to the impact of online learning, however, the UNT Community must recognize that not all students are affected by online learning in the same way and that not all students utilize UNT counseling services to address mental health concerns stemming from the involved policies.

WHEREAS, Some students are comfortable in an in-person experience, as may be necessary for certain classes and majors.

WHEREAS, As UNT’s most important stakeholders, UNT students should be the primary focus when prioritizing funds and effort for concerns such as these.

WHEREAS, Students should determine for themselves whether the consequences of being online outweighs the consequences that comes from the threat of COVID-19 through in-person interaction.

LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT, UNT permit and empower the implementation of a virtual learning option in all classes.

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, Adequate funds be allocated to this initiative for its implementation as necessary.
LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, A notice that UNT will accommodate students who are unable to execute their isolation plan be posted prominently on the UNT Health Alerts website and regularly posted on Division of Student Affairs social media accounts.

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, The Student Government Association at UNT issues its support for students facing physical or emotional turmoil as a consequence of in-person instruction.

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, Copies of this legislation be sent to the following individuals:

- Dr. Neal Smatresk, UNT President
- Dr. Elizabeth With, Vice President for Student Affairs
- Clayton Gibson, UNT Chief Financial Officer
- Dr. Jennifer Cowley, UNT Provost
- Dr. Holly Hutchins, Vice-Provost of Faculty Success
- Dr. Adam Fein, Vice-President for Digital Strategy and Innovation
- Dr. Rudi Thompson, Executive Director for the Center for Learning, Experimentation, Application, and Research (CLEAR)

Respectfully Submitted,

Senator Peyton McFarlain  
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Devon Skinner  
UNT SGA President

Bella Armenta  
UNT SGA Student Allocations Director

Casey Jimenez  
UNT SGA Chief-of-Staff

Senator Grant Johnson  
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Senator Lauren Allen  
Honors College
Appendices

Appendix A (Provided anonymously on Twitter by a student, courtesy of @anonuntsquirrel):

Same day, another biology subdivision professor who states they have chronic health issues *does not wear a mask* in an overcrowded classroom, and does not socially distance. They are also less than 4 feet away from people in the front row, and even coughs almost directly onto a student. They also do not give exam make-ups in the event of covid, and all exams are to be done in-person, despite the overcrowding present in the first week. There was then a less-than-helpful email that was sent out thereafter in a
Appendix B (Provided anonymously on Twitter by a student, courtesy of @anonuntsquirrel):

First day in class, a literal ***immunology*** professor goes on a tangent during their introduction in an overcrowded classroom, and instates: "I don't know why we even have to wear these," while pointing at his Kn95 mask. "I'm only doing it to be a good role model"... when not even 15 seconds later, the professor states "I'm double vaxxed, boosted, and am currently getting over Omicron..." and then coughs into the mic. You could hear a PIN drop in that room.
Another biology professor, an older person, has covid according to a student on campus. Wandered around a room, mask on their chin, coughing and hacking the whole time. Said student reported the professor was suffering from covid via their own admission, and only at the last minute this last Thursday (1/20) decided to do an online lecture... from their office on campus. Likely exposed the entire classroom.
Appendix D (Posted on Twitter by a student):

“turn to your neighbor and give them a dumb ass look. If they’re wearing a mask it’s already a dumb ass look” - professor that’s not wearing a mask LOL

9:40 AM · 18 Jan 22 · Twitter for iPhone

6 Retweets 4 Quote Tweets 160 Likes
Appendix E (Section of a Professor’s syllabus, posted on Twitter by a student):

From the DOS Office: https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources
... your professors have no obligation to make temporary adjustments [for illness, death in the family, etc.]. If they decline to allow adjustments you may need to withdraw from the course, take an Incomplete, or repeat the class in the future.

SOME GROUND RULES FOR THIS COURSE.
1. There are no make-up labs. We just do not have the capability for doing this.
2. Absences must be submitted to the Dean of Students.
3. Any absence note should be given within a week of the missed lab to the Dean of Students and the TA and Lab Supervisor notified. If a week has already passed, then it is a zero for the exam/participation/attendance that was missed.
Appendix F (Posted on Twitter by a student):

i feel like i’m living in a simulation ..... i know it’s not the professors fault, but UNT please start caring about your students health and offer online options

Yes, I am streaming class via Zoom, but only students who have approval through the Dean of Students will receive the passcode to access our Zoom class. I wish everyone good health and hope to see you in class later today.

7:17 AM · 20 Jan 22 · Twitter for iPhone

5 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 19 Likes
March 10, 2022

Dear David:
I have signed the attached S2022-R1 – Online Learning Options in acknowledgement of its passing. As I shared at the SGA meeting, there are inherent challenges with transitioning all classes to multiple modalities so that students can choose the method in which they receive a course each class period. This is costly and puts an additional burden on faculty. Faculty Senate should have been part of your research.

Additionally, it is important to note that at the time of the signing of this legislation, the COVID-19 dashboard showed that we had 94 COVID cases. While we were faced with snow days that reduced the amount of testing for that week, we have experienced a decline in cases over the last 3 weeks. We remain hopeful this trend will continue and we will truly reach the status of endemic soon.

Please include a copy of this letter with the legislation when posted on the SGA website or archived.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth With, Ed.D.
Vice President for Student Affairs