

**Subject:** A message from Faculty Senate President Louis Gross: COVID and the semester

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**From:** Faculty Information on behalf of Spirko, Robert L

**To:** FACULTYINFO@LISTSERV.UTK.EDU



## Faculty Senate

Message from Faculty Senate President,

Louis Gross

**UTK Faculty Colleagues:**

On behalf of the Faculty Senate, this is to communicate about a variety of issues and plans for this academic year.

As we all know, the past two academic years have been challenging for all UT employees and our students. Please continue to treat all in our community with kindness, compassion, and respect. Many of us have lost friends, family members, and colleagues. We may not be aware of the challenges and sorrow that our colleagues and students have faced.

I hope that you will encourage your students and colleagues to get fully vaccinated. Over decades, through public financial support of basic and applied science and tremendous effort by researchers, including our UT colleagues, it has been possible to develop and produce the highly effective vaccines that are available. Please help all in our community appreciate that these vaccines arose through careful science, and that vaccination is critical to reduce the pain and suffering of others from this highly infectious virus. Emphasize to students that vaccination greatly reduces the potential for them to miss classes due to infection.

To help our students, many of whom have had little exposure to on-campus life, UTK has established the Vols Start Back initiative. Details are [at this Division of Student Success page](#). As you meet students this semester, please inform them about the opportunities available to them through this program and any others being

sponsored by your Colleges or Departments.

Regarding classes, following conversations with the Provost and Chancellor, I encourage you to be creative and do whatever is pedagogically appropriate for your classes to meet the challenges of teaching this semester. This includes being open to alternative modes of interaction with your students than you may have used pre-pandemic. As you deem best, consider offering a mixture of in-person and on-line options for course components and office hours. Carefully consider the types of accommodations you will be offering if a few or many of your students are unable to attend class in person. If your classroom has the capability, consider recording your classes to provide options for students who, through no fault of their own, have to miss class. The situation this term will be fluid and I encourage you to be prepared for challenges and changes as the term progresses. The Office of Information Technology has solutions available to enhance teaching including audio reinforcement for lecturing through a mask – information is at this [OIT Classroom Technology](#) page. Be sure to ask if you have needs that they might address.

Many faculty have asked me about the potential to survey their classes regarding student vaccination status. Although there is no legal restriction to asking about vaccination status, there is no requirement that a response must be given, there is no guarantee of accuracy of responses, and any action you might take based on a student's vaccination status is likely either illegal or could be challenged through a variety of UTK and other processes. Thus, I suggest that carrying out such a survey would not be helpful unless it connects with the topics in the course.

Finally, the Senate continues to address the wide array of issues required by effective shared governance at UTK. As the campus moves to a new Budget Model, continues to plan for new courses and curricula, and meets the challenges of our growing student population, I encourage you to contact your Senators ([senate.utk.edu](http://senate.utk.edu)) with your suggestions and concerns. In alignment with a transparent UT, I am regularly updating the [Senate President's website](#) with responses on many campus issues.

Thank you for all you do to advance UTK.

Stay well,

Lou

Louis J. Gross (he, him, his)  
Chancellor's Professor and Alvin and Sally Beaman Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and Mathematics

Faculty Senate President  
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## Contact Us

### Faculty Senate

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