

Dear Campus Community:

As we return from spring break and the pandemic continues to evolve, with COVID-19 conditions improving, MCLA will begin modifying some of its COVID-19 public health protocols. Case counts are down, risk of severe illness and death is greatly reduced, and guidance around masking and testing is changing at national, regional, and local levels. For example, local municipalities and school districts are lifting their mask mandates. Recently, higher education campuses in Massachusetts received a letter from the Executive Office of Education and the MA Department of Public Health strongly encouraging campuses to reduce COVID-19 protocol mandates.

Given the significantly improved public health environment of our community and recent guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, **effective Wednesday, March 30 MCLA will transition to a mask optional campus and asymptomatic testing will no longer be required for students who are fully vaccinated and boosted.** Free campus testing for students, faculty, and staff will continue to be available through May 12 (testing days will remain Tuesday-Thursday, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.).

As MCLA lifts its current indoor mask mandate beginning on Wednesday, March 30, masks will be optional around campus and individuals should decide to wear or not wear a mask based on their personal choice. There are notable exceptions:

- Masks will be required in the MountainOne Wellness Center (Health and Counseling Services, and our COVID-19 testing site), as required by MA state law.
- Faculty have the option of requiring masks in their classrooms. Students must comply with individual faculty requests.
- In designated offices as posted.
- The college reserves the right to require mask-wearing at any time in the future, if COVID-19 related data necessitates it.
- Unvaccinated individuals are required to continue to wear masks in all indoor spaces.

Mask wearing is still a successful tool in preventing the spread of germs. As we transition to a mask-optional environment please be respectful of each other's choices. We encourage people to wear masks, if they choose, and to always have one with them.

As we have throughout the course of the pandemic, MCLA will continue to monitor campus, local, regional, and national data surrounding COVID-19 and be prepared to respond to changes as necessary. If our safety protocols need modification, or the conditions change, we will be responsive and continue to keep the campus informed.

Vaccination rates among faculty, staff, and students is at least 97%, providing a high level of protection from serious illness. As always, please continue to monitor yourself for COVID-19 symptoms every day before coming to campus or heading to class. Vaccination and booster shots will continue to be required of students, staff, and faculty for Fall 2022. New students and employees will be required to show proof of vaccination and booster.

Over the past two years, we went to impressive and significant lengths to protect one another and minimize risks to keep our campus community as safe as possible during a global pandemic that touched our personal and professional lives. In true Trailblazer form, we persevered in taking care of our own

health and safety and the health and safety of our fellow students and colleagues. Thank you for your resilience and compassion as we continue to be responsive and responsible citizens during such unprecedented circumstances.

**James F. Birge, Ph.D.**

President

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