

May 24, 2021

Dear Chancellor Haefner,

Thank you for empaneling the Task Force on Working at DU, 2021-22. I had the great honor of working with an outstanding group of colleagues in thinking through how best to support our faculty and staff colleagues in the transition to Fall 2021. As you'll recall, we were directed by your charge as follows:

The Task Force on Working at DU 2021-22 is charged to make recommendations regarding the expectations for most faculty and staff to resume an in-person, on campus presence and also recommend how the campus can most fairly, equitably, and consistently manage remote work options for academic year 2021-2022.

The charge identified the following guiding principles:

- Individual health and well-being of our community members is paramount;
- Institutional success as it pertains to in-person vibrancy on campus is critical;
- The university is committed to an exceptional, high-quality student experience; student-facing personnel are expected to be on campus;
- Fiscal responsibility is needed; and
- Policy development should be guided by equity, fairness and consistency.

Before highlighting our key recommendations, I'm proud to say that this was an enormously hardworking task force! In addition to our half-dozen large group meetings, we also worked in small teams to develop recommendations related to (1) a graduated return to campus, (2) facilities planning, and (3) a proposed framework for a remote work policy. The task force conducted five focus groups with a cross-section of front-line staff and staff supervisors (led by task force member Katia Miller), one focus group with faculty (led by task force member Sarah Pessin), and a dozen focus groups with a cross-section of University Council membership (led by all task force members). We had also considered conducting a survey with faculty and staff, to invite reflections on this COVID year with an eye to what lessons we might apply moving forward, but opted to conduct focus groups instead as a better vehicle for managing participants' expectations. Lastly, we solicited feedback from the Cabinet, deans, and vice provosts on successive drafts of our recommendations.

We are pleased to share the following top-line recommendations with you and have also attached our longer, more detailed set of recommendations.

1. Supporting our faculty and staff colleagues in the transition to Fall 2021

As a university, we seek to welcome and revitalize our campus community, recognizing that the dual pandemics have created varying levels and types of stress and loss in our community.

We faced the COVID challenge together by recognizing the need to focus on care for ourselves and for each other, and we recommend a similar approach to the transition to Fall 2021. As a caring community with high standards for excellence, we look forward to providing a solid foundation for our faculty, staff, (and students) for a return to fall.

- A. Plan on a graduated return, with a soft launch of 1-2-3 days per week of on-campus work beginning in mid-June or early July and building through August.

- B. At the same time, encourage staff and faculty to take real breaks this summer. It has been a long COVID year, and it is important that folks take the time needed to refresh and recharge.

Consideration should be given to a long 4th of July weekend, where Monday, July 5 is already a public and university holiday. Friday, July 2 and Saturday, July 3 could additionally be announced as university holidays, with the challenge being that classes are currently scheduled for both days. We suggest authorizing those teaching courses on July 2 and/or 3 to take one or two floating holidays during the summer months, and the remainder of the university could have an extended July 4 holiday weekend.

- C. Develop university-wide and unit-based messages that balance compassion, welcome, opportunity, vibrancy, and recognition of the challenges that individuals and units have experienced in this last year.
- D. Encourage units/departments/teams/supervisors to develop unit-specific plans for a graduated return to on-campus work following the end of the spring term, specifically for June, July, and August.
- E. Encourage units/departments/teams/supervisors to identify where and how psycho-emotional resources will be shared and accessed to support faculty and staff colleagues. Consider providing trauma-informed leadership and supervisory training.
- F. Foster a more vibrant sense of community by supporting groups with shared interests, and support community members in making new connections by hosting university- and unit-wide social events on campus. We encourage scaffolding these social events across the academic year and providing modest seed funding to support these and other social/community activities.

Importantly, we encourage viewing the return to fall as an opportunity to create new traditions and/or rituals at DU that can help further our sense of community. Our detailed recommendations provide some ideas on what these new traditions could be.

2. Planning for facilities for AY 21-22

Our Task Force also considered what adjustments might be needed for facilities planning, including classroom and other shared space planning, for AY 21-22. We share the following:

- A. Buildings will have no spacing/capacity restrictions. There will be no distinction between shared spaces vs. individual offices. Signage that restricts seating, restrooms, water fountains, exiting, path of travel, etc., will be removed.
- B. Consideration might be given to hosting a marketing campaign communicating how safe the campus is.
- C. Consistent with our recommendation for a graduated return to fall, we recommend a phased return by staff and faculty to their buildings and offices to enable appropriate supports for computer refreshes, replacing lost keys, etc.

3. Piloting a remote work policy in AY 21-22 to be assessed for potential longer-term adoption

DU is a residential campus committed to a rich and vibrant on-campus experience. Any provision for remote work should support and enhance that sense of vibrancy and community.

We recognize that there was a desire, prior to the pandemic, to develop campus-wide guidelines for remote work. We also note that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that DU employees can be highly successful and productive while working remotely. Opportunities for remote work may enhance our employee value proposition, enabling even stronger recruitment and retention, while the absence of such provisions may place us at a competitive disadvantage vis a vis other higher ed and non-higher ed employers. Remote work may also have a positive impact on our institutional carbon footprint.

In our detailed recommendations, we propose the outlines of a remote work policy at the university level with guidelines for implementation at the unit-level. We understand that HRIC stands ready to develop an even more detailed remote work policy for implementation, drawing on DU's past practices and those of our higher ed peers, if what is proposed here is deemed worthy of expansion.

It is our intention that unit-level implementation enable units/department/programs/offices to address employees' interest in flexibility on a unit-specific basis, while reflecting the university's overarching commitment to promote greater vibrancy of the campus and student experience.

We suggest piloting a university-wide remote work policy for benefitted and non-benefitted staff in AY 21-22, with review and assessment as to its ongoing application, if any. We also note in this context our expectation that faculty be present on campus as they were prior to COVID-19.

Please let us know of any questions or concerns regarding our detailed recommendations (attached). We are happy to continue our work in thinking through appropriate supports for our faculty and staff colleagues as we look forward to the return to Fall 2021.

Thank you again for convening this important task force.

With best regards,

Mary Clark, provost

On behalf of

Todd Adams, Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs
Paul Chan, Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs and General Counsel
Sarah Childs, Manager, HR Shared Services
Vivek Choudhury, Dean, Daniels College of Business
Garret Glass, President, Staff Advisory Council
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Michael Levine-Clark, Dean, University Libraries
Jerron Lowe, Interim Vice Chancellor, Human Resources and Inclusive Community
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