



FACULTY SENATE

September 10, 2021

John Sharp
Chancellor
Texas A&M University System
301 Tarrow Street
College Station, TX 77840

M Katherine Banks, PhD
President
Office of the President
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX 77843-1246

Dear Chancellor Sharp and President Banks:

As the Immediate Past Speaker of the TAMU Faculty Senate, I am writing on behalf of the “Order of the Broken Gavels” which as you may know, is the assembly of Former Speakers of the TAMU Faculty Senate. The “broken gavels” met by Zoom recently (August 31, 2021) to discuss current COVID management policies on the TAMU campus. After lengthy discussion of concerns for the health and safety of TAMU students, faculty, and staff, a resolution addressing the health and safety of the TAMU community was drafted and approved and is respectfully presented to both of you as Chancellor and President.

The “broken gavels” fully recognize the difficult pathways faced by both of you in working to protect the health and safety of the TAMU community during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, at our meeting many of the “broken gavels” also expressed grave concerns over the current policies for several reasons. First, as you are aware, the aggressive delta strain of the COVID virus is leading to a dramatic rise in new infections, serious illness, and even death in younger populations. Texas is one of many southern states experiencing a dramatic surge in COVID infections at the very time that students are returning to the TAMU campus from major population centers in Texas experiencing surges in COVID infections. Thus, it is quite likely that this will lead to an explosion of cases in the coming weeks. Indeed, during the first week of classes, the number of active self-reported cases increased dramatically, nearly doubling from 786 (August 30) to 1,413 cases (Sept 7) in just one week! As would be expected, nearly all of this increase occurred in students returning to campus for the fall semester.

Second, our public health experts estimate that only 30% of TAMU students have been vaccinated. This fact combined with a plethora of back to school parties and football games, and the absence of masking or social distancing requirements in the classrooms, on campus, and in the community, is bound to lead to disastrous outcomes not only for the TAMU students, faculty, and staff, but also for the Bryan/College Station community at large.

Third, many other peer universities, both public and private, have chosen to take more aggressive and sensible approaches to protecting their university communities by requiring vaccination, masking, social distancing, and/or an on-line beginning to the fall semester to minimize the spread of the delta strain of the COVID virus.

Fourth, as a matter of academic freedom, all faculty should have at their discretion the ability to control the health and safety of their classrooms by requiring masking and social distancing and other practices in order to protect the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff.

Finally, the failure of TAMU to exercise more aggressive health and safety practices to combat the spread of the COVID viruses in the classrooms and on campus reflects very poorly on an institution such as TAMU that prides itself upon the practice of leadership by example and the "Aggie Core Values."

We understand that the COVID-related Executive Orders recently issued by Governor Abbott make it difficult to engage more aggressive health and safety practices; however, we do not want to see the bottom line of COVID management succumb to political pressures over the health of our students, faculty, and staff. We have the health and scientific expertise of our amazing faculty to successfully guide us through the pandemic, and we should openly and proudly display that expertise so that our actions are guided by science and not by politics.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John N. Stallone". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

John N. Stallone, PhD
Professor of Veterinary Physiology and
Former Speaker of the TAMU Faculty Senate (2012-13 and 2020-21)
(Letter Endorsed by 20 Former Speakers of the Faculty Senate)

Resolution:

Whereas the health and safety of TAMU students, faculty, and staff are of utmost importance, and

Whereas the policies of the State have hindered the university in making optimal decisions affecting the health of the TAMU community,

We, the past Speakers of the TAMU Faculty Senate (the Order of the Broken Gavels), strongly support all reasonable measures undertaken by the teaching faculty to help ensure the safety of all in the TAMU community even if they may conflict with policies dictated by the State,

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John N. Stallone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

John N. Stallone, PhD
Immediate Past Speaker of the TAMU Faculty Senate and
Chair of the Order of the Broken Gavels
(Resolution Endorsed by 20 Former Speakers of the Faculty Senate)