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As Spring Quarter Ends COVID-19 Questions Remain With New Policy Changes

Ashley Hagar, Staff Reporter

Seattle University recently decided that all students returning to campus in the fall will be required to get the COVID-19 vaccine unless they have an approved exemption due to medical or religious reasons. However, there is currently no requirement implemented for faculty and staff on campus.

When making the decision to require students to be vaccinated, Seattle U could refer to their previous requirements for vaccines like measles, but for faculty and staff, there is no current requirement in place. Making the decision to require faculty and staff to be COVID-19 vaccinated would require creating an entire new policy that would need approval from Human Resources..

While not enforced by Seattle U, many faculty and staff members are still getting vaccinated and encouraging their coworkers to as well. Christopher Paul, a professor in the Communication and Media Department and the president of the Faculty and Staff Senate shared his concerns about returning to in-person classes in the fall.

“I do think that the university should be looking at a requirement for faculty and staff to be vaccinated because I think it’s in the best interest of everybody and it’s safer for our students, faculty and staff,” Paul said.

He also commented that a lot of the facilities are not large enough to accommodate social distancing and large enough class sizes. For this reason, Paul talked about how some classes are more appropriate for online learning than others, simply due to the size of facilities.

“I know that one of the discussions that happened a lot last spring as we first moved into this is that certain classes kind of work better on Zoom in some ways than in-person socially distanced with masks,” Paul said. “You have language courses where obviously seeing somebody’s mouth is an important piece of learning, and you’ve got classes that rely heavily on small group communication, and having many people talk in somewhat muffled voices could have a really negative impact.”



Adeline Ong

While the university has not made any final decisions about vaccine requirements for faculty and staff, they have made other decisions for students based on local public health guidance. On May 17, Seattle U announced that they would be lifting the requirement to wear masks outdoors for fully vaccinated people.

Second-year Business analytics student, Jay Grant, is excited about what the new mask policy on campus allows.

“I am really hopeful with the new mask policy on campus,” Grant said. “Being vaccinated definitely helps give me the peace of mind to walk outside without a mask. Although I don’t think I’m ready to be inside without a mask, this is definitely a step in the right direction. I’m ready to be able to keep taking steps in the right direction and getting into what will be the new normal.”

Seattle U sent this updated information to students, faculty and staff in an email, based on the guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Seattle U still requires masks be worn indoors for everyone unless in a private space alone.

With only about 19% of the Seattle U community vaccinated, there have not been any other announcements regarding face coverings for the next academic year. Student Health Center Director, Tara Hicks, hopes to be able to move toward a no face covering requirement in the near future.

“Seattle U is still waiting on guidance from the American College Health Association and Governor Inslee’s office,” Hicks said. “But with high vaccination numbers and decreased cases, I hope that it is possible. Although Governor Inslee has said fully vaccinated people can be indoors without face coverings, he still defers to the local public health departments.”

Per the CDC guidelines regarding vaccinated people not needing to be tested unless showing symptoms, Seattle U has removed the requirement for weekly testing for fully vaccinated residents.

Housing and Residence Life sent an email to on campus residents May 21 sharing the news. Hicks also shared that Seattle U has had a very low infection rate with only 10 students testing positive out of over 11,000 tests. While students are still given the option to continue regular testing, it is no longer mandatory for those who are considered fully vaccinated.

While Seattle U is taking steps toward returning to normal by lifting the mask policy outdoors and reducing necessary tests for vaccinated students, some concerns still stand when it comes to returning in-person in the fall, some faculty remain skeptical about how comfortable they may be without a vaccination requirement in place.



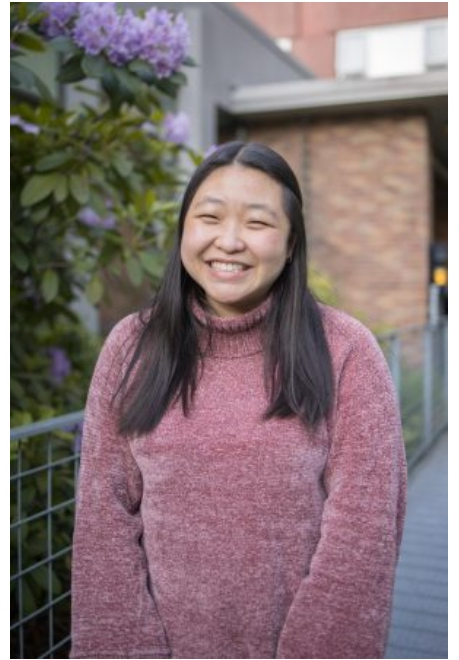
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