

Heller Faculty and Staff Check-in Meeting
Monday, January 31, 2022
Q&A

I. Masks, Distancing, and Eating

1. When do you anticipate Covid rules and guidelines might loosen up?

We anticipate being able to loosen up our rules quickly once we feel it is safe to do so. We will wait and see what our positive test rates are in coming weeks, and then we will adjust accordingly. We are transitioning into thinking about this virus as endemic, controllable with vaccines.

This may be the most challenging semester given collective fatigue from the pandemic and the changes in behavior and precautions it has required. However, Brandeis as an institution is focused on how it will operate to mitigate the transmission and spread of the virus on campus. The university will do what it can to mitigate this, and we also need each community member to continue to help mitigate the spread.

2. Have the mask rules changed since the fall semester?

Yes. Currently, the City of Waltham has a mask mandate in place due to the rise of Omicron and the increased transmissibility of it. Since Brandeis is in Waltham, we are observing that mandate. In the fall, we loosened our masking requirements so that instructors could unmask to teach if the rest of the class was masked, and there were opportunities for students to be unmasked in theater classes, for example, provided they had a green passport and had all just tested. Those options are not currently available, given the city's mask mandate: faculty and students must be masked in class at all times.

You will need to wear a mask that fits tightly around your face. Gaiters, scarves and face shields are not acceptable face coverings. We strongly encourage you to wear a high filtration mask such as K95, KN95 and KF94. Heller administration will make high filtration masks available to all Heller faculty, students and staff in the first week and then maintain a running supply available at Heller in case people lose or damage their mask. Please also avail yourselves of the free masks from the federal government which will soon be available at pharmacies. We recommend you use, at minimum, a surgical mask and not just a cloth mask. If you would like to continue wearing a cloth mask, put a surgical mask underneath or put a filter in your cloth mask. This is not a rule; it is a strong recommendation.

If our Covid rates decline and the city removes its mask mandate, we can start to loosen up the mask policy. **See the update made on Monday, 2/7/22 about guidance on masking.**

3. Is mandatory social distancing still in effect?

No, social distancing rules were dropped in the fall. Everyone should take responsibility for finding ways to feel comfortable in the building. For example, if you do not feel safe walking down a crowded hallway, then avoid doing that.

4. Can food and beverages be served at events? If not, will we be notified when this policy changes?

As of now, Brandeis food policy does not allow food and / or beverages to be served at events. We are eager to bring this back as soon as possible. We anticipate our policies will loosen up rapidly this semester, as soon as we can do it safely. **On Monday, 2/7/22, the following update was made to the policy on food at events:** *We also know that gathering together is important to our community. Indoor events with food or beverages may now be held with 50 percent capacity in certain large spaces through February 18th, and at full capacity after February 18th, provided that positivity rates remain low on campus.*

5. How are students expected to eat with in-person classes? Understandably, once it got cold in the Fall, students were unmasked in hallways all over Heller eating lunch, as there was nowhere else to go. This led to me being unable to maintain distance from unmasked people, which I am uncomfortable with during Omicron.

Brandeis dining halls will be open, with some reduced capacity, and available for students to use to eat lunch. Students are encouraged to eat in dining halls and they are welcome to bring their own food. Students are also permitted to eat in common areas where social distancing is possible, such as the Zinner Forum.

6. Can you please talk about the measures in place for the facilities and custodial staff in terms of providing the necessary protective equipment, e.g., N95s and face shields for entering into isolation or quarantine areas?

University custodial staff have been provided with the appropriate PPE and additional training to follow strict protocols. We have also had contract workers on campus who are also highly trained to do their work in spaces where Covid-positive students are residing. As always, we are grateful for the work done by our custodial staff colleagues, particularly in these trying circumstances.

II. Testing, Contact Tracing, and Boosters

7. Is testing on campus the same now as it was last semester, and is contact tracing still in effect?

Testing is still twice per week for all students and unvaccinated individuals. For faculty and staff who are vaccinated, you still need to be tested once per week if you come to campus. You are welcome to test more often if you feel you need to. This may change later in the semester if we see the rate of positive tests decline. Brandeis is still conducting contact tracing, unlike some institutions.

If you think you were exposed, reach out to a contact tracer or take a Covid test at home. If you tested positive for Covid over the break, let a contact tracer know so that you can get an exemption from the campus testing requirement. **You can reach the contact tracer at: c19testing-group@brandeis.edu.**

8. If you test at home, does that affect your Passport?

No. The only test that impacts your passport is the test done on campus. To test on campus, first complete the daily health assessment, then schedule a test to occur within the next 24 hours. Once your test is scheduled to occur within 24 hours, your passport will be Yellow and you will be allowed on campus. Once you drop off your test sample, your passport turns green. Your passport color changes from yellow to green based on submitting your test (not based on when you receive your result). For staff and faculty, your test result is good for 7 days.

9. What should I do if I test positive at home? Should I come to campus for another test to confirm the result?

No. If you test positive at home, please stay home. **Contact a contact tracer at c19testing-group@brandeis.edu** to let them know you tested positive and follow their instructions.

10. Will we be notified if someone in our work area has COVID or only if we were a close contact?

You will only be notified if you are a close contact of the person who tested positive. This has always been the policy. Identifying close contacts preserves the confidentiality of the positive patient and respects their situation. Some teams that work closely together have agreed ahead of time to let each other know if they test positive. If you work closely with a team in person, you could also decide to agree to do this.

11. What happens with testing after you have tested positive?

Morgen Bergman is aware of studies at Harvard (currently unpublished) looking at the virulence levels of positive patients after different periods of time. Harvard data suggest that, on the sixth day, 39% of people are still contagious, however, by the seventh day, that percentage drops significantly to 13%. At Brandeis, people who have any symptoms at all will not be permitted to come back until 10 days after their positive test. Your contact tracer will take into account your symptoms and make a determination as to when you are allowed to return to campus.

After recovering and returning to campus, you will be exempt from testing at Brandeis for 90 days. This is because you will be continuously shedding dead virus and the PCR test will pick that up. The test would not mean you are contagious, it just means you are still shedding the virus. You will still need to complete the daily health assessment every day before coming to campus.

12. What is the deadline to upload our proof of booster shots?

Vaccine clinics and vaccine booster uploads will be governed by Brandeis Human Resources going forward. This is being built into their infrastructure right now.

The deadline at Brandeis for getting a Covid booster shot was January 25. The deadline to upload documentation of your booster shot was supposed to be February 15th, however, the portal is not yet open. A communication about this will be sent out in the next few days. Booster documentation will be handled through Mediat: Brandeis' EMR system. Plenty of time will be given for everyone to comply with this requirement. You will receive more information soon.

III. Policies on Visitors and Travel

13. Are visitors from outside Brandeis still allowed to come to campus, e.g., for a meeting, provided they follow the visitor protocol, or has this policy changed?

There are no additional restrictions to visitors coming to campus. If it is a one-day visit, they need to fill out the daily health assessment and remain masked while on campus. For those visiting for multiple days, we ask they have a negative Covid test before they come. There is no need to register them with Brandeis or the Heller Dean's Office. The meeting coordinator may simply ask to see their negative test and make sure they wear a mask.

14. What about the Travel Policy?

The travel policy also remains the same as it was last semester. Last semester, the travel policy was lightened a bit such that a negative Covid test to board the plane counted as your first negative test to return. You only need one more negative test after your return trip before coming back to campus. See the [travel policy here](#).

IV. Teaching and Students

16. Please clarify when faculty can excuse students from attending a class and when they need to be referred to Ravi.

We are now in an in-person teaching mode. There is a very small number of students who have received prior approval to take all of their coursework online due to medical reasons or visa restrictions. If a student tests positive for Covid or cannot pass the daily health assessment, they should notify their instructor that they cannot come to class for health reasons, and the instructor should make arrangements for them to join class virtually or otherwise satisfy class participation. Other than that, classes are in person and if a student misses class due to travel or other reasons, this should be handled as it would have been before Covid, e.g., the student can do make-up activities. There should not be an expectation that students automatically get to switch to dual mode just because they'd like to or because it is more convenient.

Beyond making sure we deliver on our promise of being in an in-person mode, we do want to be mindful of mental health needs and be flexible; for example, giving extensions to students.

Communication between faculty, staff, and students is key. We want to make sure students understand that we will be flexible with deadlines, that they should not attend class in person if they are sick and will not be penalized, but that we do expect them to attend in person if they are not sick.

It is up to faculty to hold firm on our policies. Please only ask Ravi Lakshmikanthan to mediate questions when absolutely necessary. Students or faculty requesting a formal accommodation should follow the Brandeis procedures to receive that designation.

17. In the past, there have been times when a student had to miss class because they tested positive, but then they returned the next day. Is it safe to assume the contact tracers are managing the student's return and everything is Ok?

It is always fine for faculty to ask to see a student's Covid Passport. If someone is still within their isolation period, or the contact tracers are saying they should quarantine, their passport will be gray.

V. Community Topics

19. Have there been any disparate effects of these policies on students, staff or faculty by race, religion, disability, or other identity at Brandeis or at Heller?

One thing we know from the vast evidence from the pandemic is that it has had a disproportionate effect on people of color, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable communities. Our assumption is that this is true in our own community as well, however we do not have specific measures of that. The digital divide is undoubtedly one manifestation of this among our students. Students who live with other students and test positive might face additional challenges interacting with others online because of their need to isolate within a group setting.

20. Can we address norms for work teams that have been remote and if there are expectations to start coming to campus

We urge people to come back to the building over the next few weeks. We understand many research institutes and centers have been more remote for a longer period of time and we know their return might be a little slower. Over the course of February, we encourage researchers and staff to adhere to the telework agreements they made in the fall and come to the building more often, or work with their supervisor to revise those agreements if needed. The procedures and safeguards described here and in other Brandeis materials will provide us all a way to work in person and with safety. As always, however, we will be guided by the facts on the ground and keep the community informed of any changes to our policies.