**August 11, 2021 - POLICY UPDATE**

As new students arrive daily and the Office of Student Affairs and Vocation is gearing up for orientation, we are again in stage 5 of Travis County’s risk-based guidelines. Vaccination remains our best tool to combat COVID-19. As of today, 98% of the staff and faculty have had at least 1 shot and 95% are completely vaccinated. Further, 94% of all master’s students are fully vaccinated. Masking is the second-best way to stay healthy while out of the home. The Seminary recognizes and celebrates the large vaccination rate, but also will continue to require masking in public spaces for extra precaution.

Starting September 7, the Seminary campus will be open to all vaccinated employees. In addition to the precautions of July 23, please note:

• Virtual meetings while in stage 5
• A hybrid format for this year’s State of the Seminary event on August 23
• The providing of breakfast and lunch by Southern Food Service, beginning on September 7, following strict health department guidelines
• No meetings in Seminary spaces by outside groups through October 15
• Library open to members of the Austin Seminary and Seminary of the Southwest communities Monday through Friday, 9:00-5:00 pm
• Fitness center open for masked workouts

**July 23, 2021 - Campus Safety Precautions**

Today, Travis County moved into its [Stage 4 COVID-19 precautions](http://austintexas.gov/page/covid-19-risk-based-guidelines).

At this time, Austin Seminary is returning to masking at work. As we move back into stricter guidelines, we know more about activities that are risky. The following are the guidelines that go into place immediately as we respond to the growing Covid transmission.

* Un-vaccinated employees should work from home and vaccinated employees are encouraged to work from home as you are able.
* Employees are not required to check-in at the McCord desk, but should keep track of days spent on campus.
* Visitors are discouraged from coming onto campus.
* Masks must be worn in all public area. This includes entrance ways, hallways, stairwells, elevators, restrooms, meeting spaces.
* Anyone who becomes ill with Covid-19 need to report to Heather Zdancewicz, hzdancewicz@austinseminary.edu, in order to determine what steps should be taken.
* Self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms; isolate and get tested if you develop self-quarantine for 10 days

**June 16, 2021 - POLICY UPDATE**

In response to updated guidelines from the CDC and the Travis County Health Department, the Seminary is making the following changes to campus operations:

Faculty, staff, and students who have submitted their vaccine information can participate in indoor or outdoor gatherings on campus without precautions. This means, that masks and physical distancing **will not be required by those who have been fully vaccinated and submitted their information to the administration**. However, if another individual requests masking or distancing in their presence, everyone should comply, even if fully vaccinated. Working in community means we will honor and respect the needs of those around us.

**June 7, 2021 - Announcement about re-opening of the campus for the fall term**

I write at a moment in which we are perhaps seeing the light at the end of a tunnel that has kept us distant and isolated far too long. With the roll-out of effective COVID-19 vaccinations, we can begin to imagine a return to normal life. Along with my colleagues on the Administrative Cabinet and under the wise council of our Board of Trustees, I am delighted to announce plans to re-open campus for the Fall term of the 21-22 academic year. I invite you to carefully review the details of our plans to reunite below, and I look forward with gratitude and great anticipation to being, once again, the embodied community known as Austin Seminary.

**The Austin Seminary campus will re-open to the Austin Seminary community at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, September 7**, beginning the 2021-22 academic year. All faculty, staff, and students will be required to have received COVID-19 vaccination. Courses will be taught in classrooms and offices will be open. We anticipate that Discovery Weekend will be in person on campus, October 29-31, and Education Beyond the Walls events will remain primarily online. At this time, the Seminary does not plan to open the campus to outside individuals or groups during the fall semester. Decisions about opening to the public will reflect the guidance of public health authorities, and while this re-opening does not include a general opening to the public, as guidance changes, so will our response.

Austin Seminary takes seriously its responsibility and duty to provide everyone with a safe place for working and learning, therefore **Austin Seminary is requiring vaccination against COVID‑19 for Seminary students, faculty, staff, and members of the Board of Trustees.** The goal is to protect—to the greatest extent possible—our students, employees, their families, and the broader community from COVID-19 infection as we all do our part to survive this worldwide pandemic. Students, faculty, staff, and trustees may obtain approval for an exemption of the vaccine requirement for medical reason or objection of conscience.

Aligning with evolving guidance by the Travis County Health Department, at this time we expect to continue to mandate mask wearing indoors (except in private offices and student living quarters). Group gatherings (including classes, meetings, worship, and dining) will be masked, socially distant, and limited in group size, all according to current Health Department guidelines. (NOTE POLICY UPDATE ABOVE)

Updates to this policy will be posted here as new information becomes available.

- Ted Wardlaw, President of Austin Seminary