

Important Information Regarding Start of Spring Semester – January Remote Classes and Building Access

Dear Cooper Faculty, Staff, and Students,

A new year is here, and a new semester awaits us. I hope everyone has been able to take time to rest and recharge during this much-deserved break from school and work obligations. Along with the possibilities and prospects of a new year can come uncertainty, something we have become all too familiar with over the last two years. We began winter break as the Omicron variant began to surge in New York City. Since then, the variant surge has dramatically multiplied worldwide. Disruptions by the resurgence of COVID-19 impacted many of our holidays and travel plans, some at the last minute, proving that to mitigate the impact of this virus, we must continue to adapt to keep our communities safe under the current conditions. With this in mind, I write to you today sharing plans for the beginning of the spring semester.

With the current high rate of contagiousness and infection from Omicron, we have made the decision to conduct all January classes remotely and to require, with limited exceptions, all employees without essential on-campus duties during this period to work from home through January 28th. Over the last few weeks, we have continued to monitor the recent increases in COVID-19 cases in New York City, New York State, and the country to ensure the latest information and trends influence this decision. Unfortunately, the reporting of positive cases right now in New York City continues to spike daily, though encouragingly, there is a relatively low level of COVID-19 related severe illnesses and hospitalizations, showing that the vaccines are doing their job. Based on current projections, it is anticipated that the peak in positive cases should start to wane in mid-January, following the effects of holiday travel. As our priority is to keep our community safe while we operate, we believe postponing the full return to campus until the week of January 31st will reduce the potential for class disruptions and allow us to more safely move about the campus and the city. Until we can resume in-person learning, our studios, labs, and makerspaces will remain closed with limited exceptions.

I recognize that beginning the semester with remote learning will be a relief to some and a disappointment to others. This decision was not simple, particularly given the nature of what we do at Cooper. We know that being on campus and taking advantage of the studios, makerspaces, and labs is a quintessential component of the Cooper experience, and if we felt that we could commit now to prudently beginning the semester in person, we would. With our increased knowledge about the virus and its variants, particularly the nature of the peaks and valleys of infection, we believe at this time that we will be able to resume in-person learning safely once this particular surge has subsided. Of course, we will continue to follow the guidance from federal, state, and city officials throughout the semester and operate accordingly.

Below this letter, I have included additional information related to logistics of this plan. Please be on the lookout for follow-up guidance from your Dean or department head, and please don't hesitate to reach out to them with any questions. I want to thank our Deans, the Health and Safety Committee, and our Facilities team for their continued care and attention to these important matters, and I want to thank you for your continued resilience and perseverance. I look forward to seeing you all once again on Cooper Square in just a few weeks.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year,
Laura

For Returning Students

We encourage students to travel back to New York City as planned to account for any travel-related transmission risks to resolve before the start of in-person classes.

We recognize that students living in the residence hall may prefer to remain at home during remote learning, should they have greater space and flexibility that way. Please continue to use the Winter Break Return Plans form that you have already received to register your plans, and email the housing team at reslife@cooper.edu with any questions. Residential students will continue to receive regular updates directly from the housing the team and should refer to those emails for additional housing related information.

Dean Chamberlin will reach out with additional information as well as resources for personal support during this time in a subsequent email. Students will also receive any relevant updates related to their academics directly from their academic programs.

For Faculty/Staff

We will have some exceptions to this policy including for those employees with essential duties, faculty who must access the buildings to fulfill their duties, and any other staffing necessary to support remote student work and administrative operations that cannot be performed remotely. We will also make classroom space available for faculty who need to teach their remote classes with Cooper technology. Any faculty or staff member who needs to be on campus should submit their request for campus access to their Dean or Department Head for approval.

Weekly testing and mask wearing will continue to be enforced. On a limited basis the College will be providing COVID testing for faculty and staff who need to enter the buildings from 1/10/2022 – 1/28/2022. The testing schedule will be announced by the end of the week.

Knowing that working remotely can be a source of stress for some, we encourage any employee who is looking for assistance to reach out to our EAP Provider at 800-252-4555.

Information from the Health and Safety Committee

As announced earlier this week, the vaccination requirement now has been expanded to require boosters for faculty, staff, and students who meet the criteria for eligibility by January 28th. We urge anyone who has not yet received a booster (and who is eligible) to get one. The Health and Safety Committee will communicate this week how to register your most current vaccine information on CUSafe.

During the next month, if you experience COVID-19 symptoms, immediately isolate yourself and get tested (using an at-home testing kit or testing site in the city and elsewhere). If you test positive, please report your results to covidreporthr@cooper.edu. You will be provided with further guidance via email. This guidance will inform you of what you need to do and available resources.

When we do return to campus, face coverings and weekly COVID-19 testing will continue to be required. We will continue to provide testing on campus. We are aware of the challenges of getting tested elsewhere. Any changes in practices or testing schedules will once again be provided by the Health and Safety Committee and updated on the [Cooper Union website](#).