WORK@DU Task Force recommendations for AY 21-22

The Charge: The Task Force on Working at DU, 2021-22, is charged to make recommendations regarding the expectations for most faculty and staff to resume an in-person, on campus presence and also recommend how the campus can most fairly, equitably, and consistently manage remote work options for academic year 2021-2022.

These recommendations will be **guided by the following principles**:

- Individual health and well-being of our community members is paramount;

- Institutional success as it pertains to in-person vibrancy on campus is critical;

- The university is committed to an exceptional, high-quality student experience; student-facing personnel are expected to be on campus;

- Fiscal responsibility is needed; and

- Policy development should be guided by equity, fairness and consistency.

Below please find our Task Force recommendations.

I. **Scaffolding supports for graduated transition to Fall 2021**

[Todd Adams, Vivek Choudhury, Mary Clark, Brian Gonzales, Sarah Pessin, Shelly Smith-Acuna]

As a university, we seek to welcome and revitalize our campus community, recognizing that the dual pandemics have created varying levels and types of stress and loss.

We faced the COVID challenge together by recognizing the need to focus on care for ourselves and for each other, and we recommend a similar approach to the transition to fall. As a caring community with high standards for excellence, we look forward to providing a solid foundation for our faculty, staff, (and students) for a graduated return for Fall 2021.

1. **Overall approach to graduated return to Fall 2021**

    A. We recommend planning on a graduated return, with a soft launch of 1-2-3 days per week on campus following the end of the spring term, beginning in mid-June to early July and expanding in August.

    B. At the same time, we recommend encouraging staff and faculty to take real breaks this summer. It has been a long COVID year, and it is important that folks take the time needed to refresh and recharge.

    Consideration should be given to a long 4th of July weekend, where Monday, July 5 is already a public and university holiday. Friday, July 2 and Saturday, July 3 could additionally be announced as university holidays, with the challenge being that classes are currently scheduled for both days. We suggest authorizing those teaching courses on July 2 and/or 3 to take one or two floating holidays during the summer months, and the remainder of the university could enjoy an extended July 4th holiday weekend.

C. We recommend both university-wide and unit-based messages that balance compassion, welcome, opportunity, vibrancy, and recognition of the challenges that individuals and units have experienced in this last year. (See more under "3. Communication")

D. More specifically, we recommend encouraging units/departments/teams/supervisors to develop unit-specific plans for a graduated return to on-campus work following the end of the spring term.

E. Provide resources for units/departments/teams/supervisors to engage in clear/transparent/compassionate communication of schedules, decision-making re: exceptions, and referrals for medical accommodations. (Again, see more under "3. Communication")

F. Establish opportunities for "drop-ins" or "check-ins" outside of already existing unit/department meetings where faculty and staff can get support or ask questions of the unit heads/deans/department chairs/program directors.

G. Develop resource repository for psychological/emotional supports and identify how individual unit/department/team/supervisor will seek HR supports or refer out (see further details below under "2. Resources").

H. Encourage units/departments/teams/supervisors to develop plan for soliciting anonymous feedback on employee experiences through at least end of fall quarter and communicate plan for how feedback will be assessed and applied.

I. Reaffirm our concern for the safety of those individuals who, for medical or religious reasons, cannot receive vaccination; and commit to working with those employees to create as safe a workplace as reasonably possible.

2. **Resources to support psycho-emotional needs of faculty and staff (and students)**

A. We begin by recognizing that our community members may have very different experiences from one another pre-COVID, during COVID, and as we return to fall. With the return to fall, some may feel elation, others fear, some may sense renewal, others may be exhausted.

At bottom, we need to support employees where they are. Resources that may be helpful include:

B. Workshops provided through HRIC and C + V

C. Discussion/support groups provided through HRIC and GSPP

D. Therapy services – EAP, Cigna lists, etc.

E. Social-emotional supports provided through music and art programming, physical exercise opportunities, interest group activities (see further details below under "4. Scaffolding Social Supports")

F. Encourage units/departments/teams/supervisors to identify where and how resources will be shared and accessed.

    a. Be familiar with EAP and how to support people accessing

    b. To best of ability, develop and communicate limitations of support and when external help/consult will be necessary and why

    c. To best of ability, develop and communicate when increased/additional assistance will be necessary and why

    d. Ensure departments/units/teams/supervisors are prepared for such limitations and increased/additional supports and what training or aid will be available at the managerial level.

       Specific understanding/preparedness re: confidentiality, privacy, psychological safety, accountability, and how "ruptures" or challenges to processes/decisions can be addressed/managed

G. Consider providing trauma-informed leadership and supervisory training.

3. **Communicating expectations for graduated return to fall**

A. We recommend articulating benefits of being together, highlighting values of community and vibrancy, while also recognizing the hardship and loss that staff and faculty have experienced this year.

B. As in Part 1, above, encourage units/departments/teams/supervisors to develop communication plans and timeframes for how/when decisions will be made re: exceptions to expectation for return to on-campus work. (See also Part III, below)

C. Create online place for faculty and staff (and students) to access a wide variety of support resources for return to fall.

D. Create videos similar to those created at the beginning of COVID to highlight these resources.

4. **Scaffolding social supports for return to fall**

A. We begin by recognizing that some of the psychological dimensions of community members' concerns about the return to Fall may relate to a profound, extended sense of social isolation. We seek to identify programming that may help redress this sense of isolation in celebrating the return to being in community.

B. Foster sense of community by supporting groups with shared interests, *e.g.,*

    a. a dog-owners/walkers group
    b. reading group / book club
    c. hiking group
    d. gardening group
    e. running group
    f. etc.

C. Support community members in making community connections by hosting social events on campus, both university-wide and within individual units.

    a. coffee hours (including in Mary Reed starting in late June or early July)
    b. cocktail hours featuring new locations on campus (*i.e.,* Community Commons, Burwell Center)
    c. ice cream socials
    d. barbecues (including on the Mary Reed patio)
    e. food trucks for lunch and/or dinner
    f. scavenger hunt
    g. "speed-dating" event for faculty and staff to get to know one another (as was done very successfully in CAHSS in recent years)

      h.   pop-ups, including volleyball, badminton, etc.
      i.   lectures by community members and/or guest lecturers
      j.   making tickets available to the DU community for sporting and performing arts events
      k.   etc.

D. **Importantly, we recommend embracing our return to fall as an opportunity to create new traditions or rituals at DU, which will help strengthen our sense of community.**

E. Identify modest funding to support these and other social/community activities on campus.

      a.   Is there a central office or source to which community members could propose activities for modest funding? *E.g.,* Conferencing and Events?

      b.   Should SAC and Faculty Senate serve as arbiters of funding requests?

F. We identified broad support to continue "Wellness Wednesdays" (no meetings each Wednesday beginning at 12 noon). Many of the above social events could be hosted during this time and could even form the basis of a new tradition at DU. There is a broad sense that the success of Wellness Wednesdays will require senior administrators to lead the way.

II.   **Planning for Facilities for AY 21-22**
[Sarah Childs, Katia Miller, Rachel Stonecypher, Sarah Watamura]

1. We believe that buildings will have no spacing/capacity restrictions come Fall 2021. There will be no distinction between shared spaces vs. individual offices. Signage that restricts seating, restrooms, water fountains, exiting, path of travel, etc., will be removed.

2. We recommend a marketing campaign to communicate how safe the campus is. This can encompass:

    A.   Emphasis on how safe the campus was in the middle of the pandemic, and all efforts will continue to maintain that high standards of safety into the Fall.

    B.   Building access will likely remain controlled to the DU community per the most recent public health disorders (more detail forthcoming).

    C.   HVAC improvements will remain in place, such as maximum air exchanges and MERV13 filters.

3. Consistent with our recommendation for a graduated return to fall, we recommend a phased return by staff and faculty to their buildings and offices.   This is critical because:

A. It allows people to get used to being in the office with a reduced amount of other people at first, and then gradually increase. This will help to avoid the shock of returning to a completely full space on Day 1.

B. The support needed to re-introduce people to the campus at one time (not phased) is not manageable. The following issues are samples of the challenges associated with people returning to their buildings:

 B.i. Access – lost keys, card access issues, parking passes

 B.ii. Computer support – set-up of desk/monitor/computer configurations; lost passwords; people who have not updated software in 12 months, reinstalling software, etc.

 B.iii. Support staff will need to be able to plan the workload in order to adequately support all of these needs.

 B.iv. Conference room AV will need to be verified so it can support a likely new expectation of flexible meeting types and audiences.

 There may need to be a significant investment of technology to make existing conference rooms hyflex-capable.

 B.v. Facilities support will be coordinated on the approach to people returning: custodial support increase, altering the HVAC and lighting for fully occupied spaces

 B.vi. Departments will need to re-order supplies

 B.vii. Surge in Work Requests (maintenance/building support needs)

 B.viii. ADA and other accommodations required by law.

C. A phased re-densification of campus facilities should begin in early summer.

 C.i. One approach might be for employees to work on campus for two days a week in July, then move up to three days per week in August, and return to full in-person work in September, absent an exception for remote work.

C.ii. We recommend that the return of staff and faculty largely occur by early to mid-August so as to avoid strain on limited resources supporting both the start of Fall term and the return of faculty and staff (and students).

C.iii. The graduated return should be organized on a unit by unit basis.

D. Need to message to faculty and staff some key items associated with returning to the office:

D.i. All DU owned property (chairs, monitors, etc.) will need to return to the physical offices in Fall.

D.ii. As people transition back into the office, they must consider that they should not expect to have full office set ups in two locations (monitors, desks) with DU property.

D.iii. Reiterate the process to return to campus (upload vaccine, testing, etc.).

III. **Recommendation to pilot a university-wide remote work policy in AY21-22**
[Paul Chan, Garret Glass, Michael Levine-Clark, Jerron Lowe, Heidi Perman]

DU is a residential campus with a commitment to a rich and vibrant on-campus experience. Any provision for flexibility of work modality, including remote work, should support and enhance that sense of vibrancy and community.

We recognize that there was a desire, prior to the pandemic, to develop campus-wide guidelines for remote work. We also note that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that DU employees can be highly successful and productive while working remotely. Opportunities for remote work may enhance our employee value proposition, enabling even stronger recruitment and retention, while the absence of such provisions may place us at a competitive disadvantage vis a vis other higher ed and non-higher ed employers. Remote work may also have a positive impact on our institutional carbon footprint.

At bottom, the challenge is to integrate our commitment to greater vibrancy of community with a desire for flexibility moving forward. Following our engagement with staff, faculty, and University Council discussion groups, our Task Force is of the view that vibrancy will best be promoted by enabling workplace flexibility at some level, *i.e.,* that staff who feel supported in their need and/or desire for workplace flexibility will bring greater vibrancy to their work on campus. Support for the flexibility of our staff was repeatedly underscored as an important way to promote the vibrancy of our community.

Below we propose the outline of a remote work policy at the university level with guidelines for implementation at the unit-level. We recommend that unit-level implementation enable units/department/programs/offices to address employees' interest in flexibility on a unit-specific basis, while reflecting the university's overarching commitment to promote greater vibrancy of the campus (including student) experience. There are a number of remote work policies and practices in effect at DU currently, and we suggest looking to those, along with policies of our peer universities, in developing a remote work policy at DU. In a related fashion, we note that a number of offices on campus have already

entered into remote work agreements with individual staff members, and we recommend that those agreements remain in effect.

During this coming pilot year, we recommend creating a process by which to evaluate and/or modify our implementation of the remote work policy, with an eye to continually improving our practice and affirming the value of the work being performed.

We suggest piloting a university-wide remote work policy for benefitted and non-benefitted staff in AY 21-22, with assessment of its ongoing application after June 30, 2022.

In a related manner, we expect faculty to be present on campus as they were prior to COVID-19. As the Chancellor and Provost have noted in their communications with the community regarding instructional modality for Fall 2021, we anticipate a robust in-person, significantly residential experience for our undergraduate students. The modality of graduate-level instruction remains substantially with the individual units to determine, with due consideration to curricular and student learning outcomes.

A. <u>We suggest adopting a campus-wide remote work policy for benefitted and non-benefitted staff, to be implemented at the unit-level (if appropriate to that unit), reserving reasonable discretion for unit leaders to engage in individual-by-individual decision making</u>.

    a. We begin by recognizing that remote work will not be appropriate for all units or all positions on campus.

        a.i. We recommend defining at the outset what units and positions may and may not be eligible for remote work by engaging in careful consideration of position responsibilities and functions. We recommend that such analysis proceed at the unit-level.

        a.ii. Consideration might be given to recognizing remote-heavy positions, where remote work provisions could be embedded *ex ante* into position descriptions. We recognize that this will likely be a small (but potentially growing) number of positions at DU.

    b. It might be beneficial to pre-pilot any university-wide remote work policy for a limited time period in Summer 2021 (in July? Between July 15 and August 15?).

B. <u>Principles guiding implementation of any remote work policy at the unit-level</u>

    a. We begin by noting that equity principles must govern our actions in this realm (*i.e.,* across the University and within units/divisions).

    b. Each unit/department/program/office must meet the reasonable in-person expectations of its stakeholders/users as determined through collaboration between the division and the unit leads.

    c. Whether the work of the unit/department/program/office is being performed remotely or in-person should not be apparent to its stakeholders/users*, i.e.,* there should be a seamless execution of work responsibilities.

d. Performance standards and essential job functions must be met, *i.e.,* job duties as well as stakeholder/user needs regarding the work of that unit must be met. If performance is negatively affected by remote work, then the remote work arrangement can be modified or ended at the discretion of the supervisor.

e. The university will need to institute new training for all supervisors to manage remote work. This training will be required for any supervisor with staff engaged in remote work.

f. The workload of a given position should not be expanded because a staff member is working remotely. Total working hours may need to be monitored, particularly for hourly staff pursuant to the Fair Labor Standards Act.

g. Public-facing office coverage needs must be met, *i.e.,* an office can't have everyone telecommute on Fridays.

h. In most units, there should be at least one day each week when all members of an individual unit/department/program/office work in-person to enable all-hands meetings or other collective activities.

   ▪ For some units (*e.g.,* the University Library), this will not be feasible because of the regular operating hours of the unit. In those units, it would be reasonable for a supervisor to require in-person attendance at certain key meetings.

i. Whenever possible, meetings should be held in-person, with those working remotely on a given day connecting virtually. When a remote participation option is not possible, meeting conveners should make reasonable efforts to adjust meeting schedules to maximize options for flexibility.

C. <u>Implementation of any remote work policy at the unit/department/program/office level should specify</u>

   a. Eligibility criteria, including:

      a.i. What are the essential duties of the individual position?

      a.ii. Does the individual position lend itself to working remotely? (We recognize that this factor might be better addressed *ex ante,* as noted in Part A(a), above).

      a.iii. How might remote work affect the vibrancy of the unit?

   b. Performance standards and training of supervisor to manage remote working

   c. On-site expectations of unit supervisor and unit's key stakeholders/users

   d. Equity principles

   e. Other guidelines as appropriate

D. <u>Overarching process provisions</u>

a. Interest in applying for a remote work arrangement should be communicated by the individual staff member in the first instance.

b. HRIC should develop a templated document that staff may use to request remote work consideration.

    b.i. This templated document should serve as the basis for any discussion of remote work arrangements between a staff member and supervisor.

    b.ii. The terms of any remote work arrangement should be reflected in a fully executed (signed) copy of the completed, templated document.

c. Decisions about remote work arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis pursuant to eligibility criteria, performance standards, supervisor training, and on-site work expectations articulated within the individual unit/department/program office, pursuant to the reasonable discretion of the responsible supervisor.

    c.i. Disagreements with a supervisor's denial of request for a remote work arrangement will be subject to the Employee Dispute Resolution process.

d. Consideration should be given to defining time-limited periods for remote-work arrangements, *i.e.,*

    d.i. expiring every quarter or every six months,
    d.ii. with need for assessment of ongoing efficacy,
    d.iii. before any renewal agreement is executed.

E. <u>Access to work technology will need to be addressed, including proper equipment, internet access, cyber security, and file access.</u>

a. Cost of additional equipment to support remote work will presumptively be borne by the telecommuting staff member

    a.i. though equity considerations will need to be addressed.

b. Costs of additional equipment may prevent remote work in some situations.

c. Data security must be strictly protected.