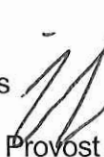


**MEMO TO:** Steve O’Kane, Professor of Biology

**FROM:** John Fritch, Dean of College of Humanities, Arts and Sciences 

**CC:** Jose Herrera, Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs & Provost  
Personnel File

**DATE:** September 29, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Disciplinary Action

This memorandum is intended to memorialize the disciplinary action being taken based on your violation of University and Board of Regents (“BOR”) policy.

On May 20, 2021, BOR President Mike Richards issued a statement noting, among other things, that “[e]ffective immediately, faculty, staff, students, and visitors to campus will not be required to wear a mask or other face covering....” That same day, UNI President Nook issued guidance to our campus community that “[e]ffective immediately, face coverings will **no longer be required** campus-wide.” On August 10, 2021, the University issued guidance via e-mail to remind our campus community that “The Board of Regents, State of Iowa guidelines prohibit all public universities from requiring masks or vaccinations on campus....Students, faculty, staff, and visitors to campus are not required to wear a mask or other face covering in our campus spaces, with the exception of particular health care settings or research labs.”

In an article that was published in *The Gazette* on September 27, 2021, you were reported to have said that you have imposed a mask mandate for students in your class and threatened to lower their laboratory grades if they refused to wear a mask. You were quoted as saying, “My students, not surprisingly, now all wear masks as they know there will be consequences to their grades.”

On September 28, 2021, at my request, you met with your department head and myself to discuss this matter. During this meeting, you acknowledged that you understood the BOR has a policy preventing the requirement of masks on campus. Despite this, you stated that you have implemented a mask mandate in one of your classes and have told those students that they would not receive credit for labs completed while not wearing a mask.

Based upon this information, it is apparent you have acted in violation of University and BOR policy by requiring masks of your students. Further, you have violated UNI Policy 6.10 regarding your responsibilities to your students by threatening to lower your students’ grades should they refuse to comply with your self-imposed mask mandate. As a result of these policy violations, I believe the following discipline is warranted:

You will be required to complete training sessions to be identified by me by October 15, 2021, that will address your professional responsibilities as a faculty member, including the need to follow university policies. You will be expected to complete such training by no later than November 30, 2021. You will also receive a “Needs Improvement” performance evaluation for the 2021-22 academic year and, as a result, you will not be eligible for merit pay.

Additionally, in order to ensure the academic integrity of your classes, you are relieved from teaching your in-person course effective today for the remainder of the Fall 2021 semester. I will be designating another faculty member to teach your in-person course. I will ask your department head to identify other duties for you to perform during the Fall 2021 semester in lieu of teaching this course. You will be expected to continue teaching your online courses.

Going forward, you will be expected to comply with all University and BOR policies, including all policies or directives regarding masks or face coverings. Failure to follow such policies may result in further disciplinary action up to and including termination.

This memorandum will be placed in your personnel file to document this disciplinary action. Pursuant to Iowa Code section 22.7(11)(a)(5) and 22.15, this document may become a public record.

*The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential counseling and additional services to help in addressing challenges facing UNI employees. Think of the EAP as a wellness support system that empowers you to realize your full potential for health and productivity. For more information, go to [hrs.uni.edu/mybenefits/eap](https://hrs.uni.edu/mybenefits/eap) or call 800-327-4692.*