



March 15, 2021

To Our SUNY Poly Community:

Last week, we collectively marked one year since the American public became broadly aware of the COVID-19 pandemic's arrival, and it seems clear that no one could have anticipated the challenges to come. In President Biden's address to the nation Thursday, he succinctly summarized the impact of our collective experience: "While it was different for everyone, we all lost something."

Everyone at SUNY Poly has made sacrifices, personally and professionally, and we continue to adapt. But, as the President also indicated, we are reminded to "find the light in the darkness." Within our SUNY Poly community, there is much light. When we started this semester, I shared my optimism, and I have been filled with pride as we not only work together to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, but also push forward to provide the unmatched educational and research opportunities that are the hallmark of our institution.

Together, we are lighting the way toward a healthier future by achieving strong compliance with the protocols that we have enacted. This aligns with greater vaccine availability across New York State and the nation, declining infection rates, and hope that the worst is behind us. For our part, SUNY Poly faculty, staff, and students are to be commended for fastidiously completing the [daily screening](#) and [weekly pooled testing](#) as required by New York State, SUNY, and local county guidelines. I strongly encourage everyone to continue to do your part—for your health and the health of our community.

By joining other SUNY institutions to host a New York State vaccination center at our Utica campus, SUNY Poly helped uplift our region. In fact, one grandmother just received the 50,000th shot provided at the Department of Health-run site. This is meaningful progress, and we played a role.

Inspired in no small measure by this positive trajectory, and mindful also of the need to plan for an increased level of normalcy in campus operations, I am pleased to announce that Interim Provost Dr. Steve Schneider and our academic leaders are conducting Fall 2021 schedule planning with a goal of a 100% in-person fall 2021 semester for those classes that would normally be held on campus. Everything that goes into this plan, as we've learned all too well in the past year, must be adaptable as circumstances warrant, and the progress made on the vaccination of our population this spring and summer will be particularly vital to our ability to achieve this goal. While our team is also making contingency plans for 25% occupancy should it be needed, serious consideration of gradual resumption of normal classroom and campus activities in coming months is vitally important to us all, and critical to our students' success.

I would also like to note that based on guidance from the local health department, I have asked Dr. Schneider to request all faculty create seating charts and take daily attendance. This simple step will help contact tracers more accurately identify close contacts of any COVID-19 positive individuals, thereby limiting the number of others who may need to engage in a precautionary quarantine. To help us meet local health department requests and as faculty finalize SUNY Poly's fall schedule, the Provost is also asking faculty to spread classes across more weekdays to reduce the density of people on campus at any one time. Such efforts can have an outsized positive effect on an individual's academic experience at this time, and I am grateful for your assistance.

We also look forward to the resumption of spring Wildcat athletics, after [SUNY Chancellor Jim Malatras](#)



[announced the news](#) in conjunction with the implementation of critical safety protocols. In addition, the Chancellor announced the SUNY for All program, “Big Dreams, Small Step,” which [eliminates application fees for low-income students applying to SUNY campuses](#). As a result, we are poised for an even more inspiring and inclusive SUNY Poly experience.

We have come so far. Yet, President Biden reminded us that we can’t let our guard down. I, too, urge you to remain vigilant and follow the implemented protocols. With that firm foundation in place and the help of everyone in our SUNY Poly community, we can light the way toward a reinvigorated SUNY Poly experience in the years to come.

I wish you all continued health, safety, and success this semester.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tod A. Laursen
Acting President
SUNY Polytechnic Institute