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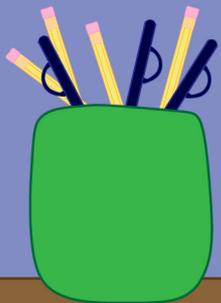
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The Oracle

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Variant COVID-19 strains should not impact USF reopening timeline, USF Health experts say



Audra Nikolajski

STAFF WRITER

New strains of the COVID-19 virus have been identified all over the world, but even if these strains spread across the Tampa Bay area, USF's plans for an in-person Summer B course schedule should not be affected, according to USF Health experts.

Known as B.1.1.7, the coronavirus variant strain was identified in COVID-19 patients around the U.K. on Dec. 14, and so far, have already spread across the country. As of Jan. 9, 63 cases of the strain have been confirmed in the U.S., 22 of which are in Florida.

The variant, however, will not slow down USF's reopening plans. Dean of the USF Morsani College of Medicine Charles Lockwood said the university's administration will not need to halt their reopening plans in light of the new variant.

"Because the vaccine, so far, we think, will protect against [the B.1.1.7 strain], there should be no disruption," he said. "We will still continue on our current path."

The current plan, according to a letter from USF Provost Ralph Wilcox sent to USF faculty Jan. 8, is to increase in-person class

availability by Summer B of this year, which is set to begin June 28.

"USF is planning for a full return to on-campus classroom delivery and activities beginning fall 2021," Wilcox said in the letter.

This strain has been a cause for concern among experts because of its 70% transmissibility rate compared to the 36% transmissibility rate of the original strain. The almost doubled rate means that anyone who comes in contact with a person who has the B.1.1.7 strain of the virus is significantly more likely to catch it than the original COVID-19 strain.

The B.1.1.7 strain, however, does not have a higher mortality rate, according to Lockwood. He said it is only perceived as more dangerous because of the speed at which it spreads.

"[The mutation in the B.1.1.7 strain] affects the spike protein in a complicated way that allows it to more easily bind to the receptor on human cells called the H2 receptor, but it doesn't modify the structure," he said.

The B.1.1.7 strain of the virus binds more easily to receptor cells, which allows it to pass from person to person more easily. But, because the H2 receptor's structure isn't significantly modified by the new strain, antibodies in the vaccine will still work because the virus has not changed into something completely new.

Since they intend to move



Despite new strains being more transmissible and potentially resistant to vaccinations, USF Health experts do not anticipate that they will impact resuming in-person classes. **ORACLE PHOTO/LEDA ALVIM**

forward with fully in-person activities, Wilcox said in the letter that the administration, faculty and staff will remain vigilant by keeping up with public health conditions that could alter this plan.

One of these changes could be the emergence of the recently identified South African variant, known as B.1.351, in the U.S. The strain has been found in Brazil, Finland, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, Switzerland and the U.K., according to The Wall Street Journal.

While this strain has not been found in the U.S. yet, it could prove threatening if it did

emerge, according to Michael Teng, associate dean of the Morsani College of Medicine.

"The variant from South Africa has a different kind of constellation of mutations, and one of those mutations that it has is uncommon and a little bit worse because people have done some lab studies and found that this particular mutation reduces your antibody response to the virus," Teng said.

"We don't know what that means functionally in terms of if we're protected or not, but the lab studies make us want to track that pretty carefully because it is a variable concern."

If it is found that the antibody response is reduced, it could mean that the currently developed vaccines are not effective against the B.1.351 strain. If this is true, and it does reach the U.S., USF plans could be put on hold.

However, this does not mean that any procedures will need to change significantly, according to Teng. He said current USF mitigation procedures will still work against both of these variants.

"The virus can't mutate through masks, so as long as we're wearing masks, washing

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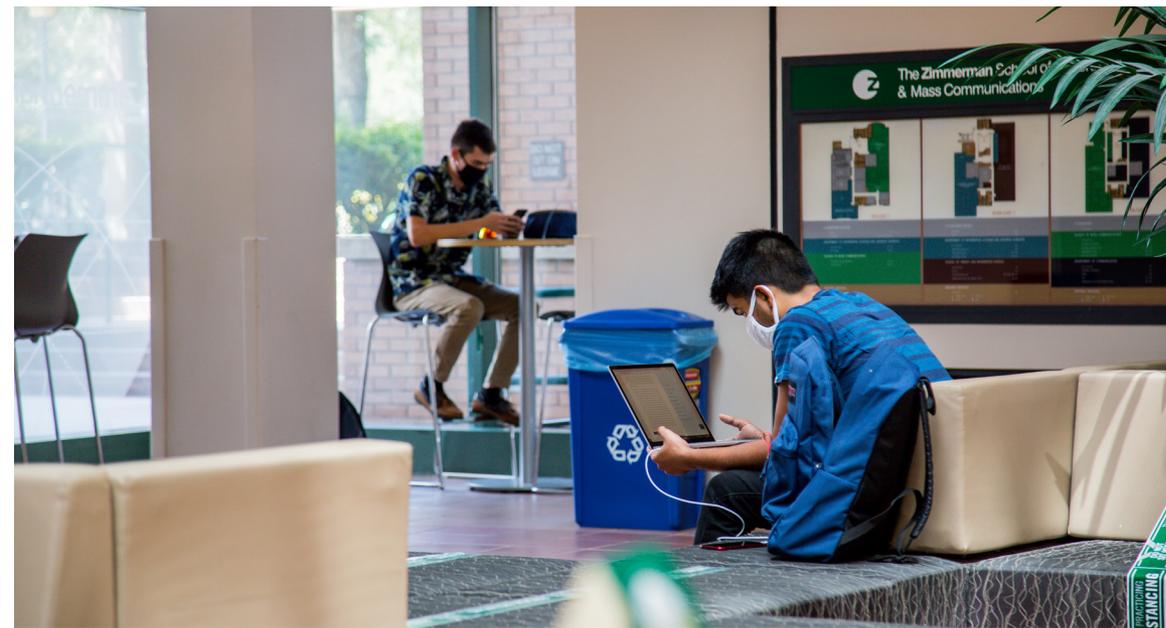
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COVID-19 mitigation strategies, randomized testing adjusted for spring



The COVID-19 Task Force made the Daily Symptom Check and Return to Campus Assessments more specific for students and staff returning in the spring and will test up to 2,000 students weekly. USF ORACLE/LEDA ALVIM



Jorgelina Manna-Rea

ASSISTANT NEWS
EDITOR

With continuously increasing amounts of cases in Hillsborough and other surrounding counties, the USF COVID-19 Task Force's mitigation measures are being slightly amped up for the spring semester as a way to more effectively reduce COVID-19 spread.

USF will be moving into the spring semester still in Phase II of the Resuming University Operations Amid a Global Pandemic plan, but with some adjustments.

Revisions have been made to the Daily Symptom Check and Return to Campus Assessment so that they are more specific in determining students' presence on campus, and

randomized testing will be done at five times the rate it was last semester, which will be around 1,500 to 2,000 students each week compared to 300 to 400 students a week in the fall.

"Numbers are up. This is not the time to relax, not the time to get close, congregate, gather, take your face mask off," said USF College of Public Health Dean and COVID-19 Task Force Chair Donna Petersen. "Now's the time to actually be more assertive in your desire to prevent this virus."

If all goes according to plan, Petersen said the university could move into Phase III during Summer B, which would then allow up to 75% of staff to return to campus. The university's current Phase II stage only allows for up to 50% of staff to return to campus.

"Apparently, we're all eternal optimists, so we're looking at the Summer B session," said Petersen. "That's our beacon. We'd love to get to Summer B and have a normal Summer B."

"We have no way to predict if

that will be a reality or not, we're very very hopeful but ... we take this ... one day at a time. We try to look enough into the future, but not overpromise."

Additional testing measures have already started as students began moving into on-campus residence halls Thursday. All students living on campus for the spring semester will receive a nasal swab PCR test by Student Health Services (SHS) as they check in to move into their dorm rooms.

"What we're going to be asking for [residents] to do is to sort of limit their activity to essential activity [while they wait for their results]," said Assistant Vice President of Housing and Residential Education Ana Hernandez. "Obviously going to get something to eat, doing their move-in process, etc, but trying to limit their contact as much as possible until those results do come back."

Hernandez said students will receive their test results 24 to 48 hours after being tested.

■ See SPRING on PAGE 18

USF experts predict peak in COVID-19 cases by February



Julie Lichterman

CORRESPONDENT

Not even a pandemic was able to prevent large crowds from gathering this holiday season, posing a risk of promoting an even larger surge in the number of daily cases in the upcoming weeks, according to USF Health experts.

As a result of holiday gatherings and travel, experts at the College of Public Health believe February will bring a major peak in cases. USF Health Morsani College of Medicine Dean Charles Lockwood hopes timely vaccination will ease these projections.

"The Thanksgiving holiday lived up to expectations, unfortunately, and I have pretty strong inclinations that the Christmas holiday will too," said Lockwood. "Our modeling at the College of Public Health suggests that we probably will see a peak sometime in February [accounting for variables]."

The predictions are showing that the peak will happen in February because the virus is taking up to 10 weeks to reach some people as it passes from person to person, public health professor and Senior Associate Dean of the Morsani College of Medicine Jay Wolfson said.

"When people transmit it, 40% of the people who get it don't know they have it ... When young, healthy people get the disease, they often times don't show any symptoms whatsoever or very mild symptoms, and then they continue to hang out with their friends," said Wolfson. "That's the next

generation of passing it on and that could go on for two or three or four generations, passing it on to other people, and that can take two, three, four, six weeks of generation.

"We're seeing the hospitalization rates increase, we're seeing the ICU rates increase, and it's a lag from three, six weeks, even 10 weeks ago, based on those generations of passing it on and based on what's happened just these past two weeks, that trend is spiraling upward, so that by the end of this month we can expect thousands of cases a day just in the Tampa Bay area. And that's likely going to last until the end of February."

Lockwood believes a vaccine will ease case progression, but only if rollout can be performed in a timely manner.

"If we can increase the rate of vaccination and increase, even by 10%, the usage of face masks and social distancing, the peak will occur earlier in February, around Feb. 8, and at a much lower level," said Lockwood.

"We're in for about another month of very serious accelerating rates of infection, but then a fairly fast drop off because of vaccination. If we do not increase vaccination rates or improve our use of social distancing and face masks, it will occur later, around Feb. 28 and be potentially twice as bad."

Edwin Michael, an epidemiologist at USF Health, also expects February to highlight the apex of positive cases as a result of holiday gatherings and travel.

"Just over Christmas, things calm down, then post-Christmas things begin to start picking up, which is what we always expected," said Michael.

Michael has conducted research simulating future COVID-19 forecasts based on previous data and predictions, which project a

■ See PEAK on PAGE 16



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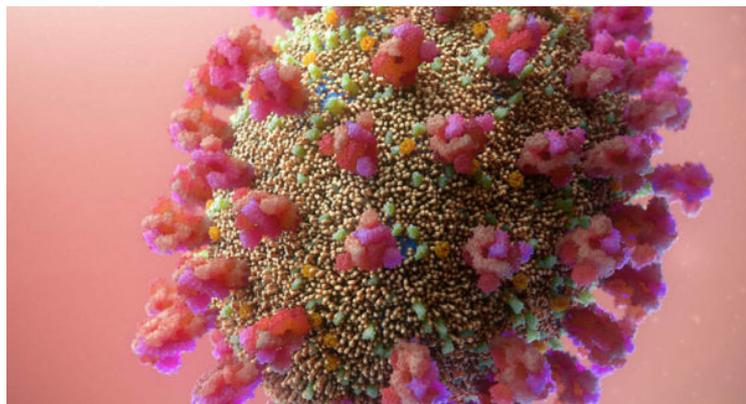
Continued from PAGE 4

hands and staying physically distant, it doesn't really matter what mutation is in the virus," he said. "A virus that can't infect somebody can't do anything so the mitigation efforts have to continue."

These efforts include mask wearing, physical distancing and keeping classrooms and lecture halls at a lower capacity. Mitigation behaviors will need to continue into the fall semester if the newest strain is not found to be prevented by the vaccine.

The B.1.1.7 and B.1.135 strains are not the first variant strains of COVID-19, according to Teng, and they will not be the last. Variant strains are extremely common because viruses, which do not originate in humans, like COVID-19, mutate in order to adapt to new species.

"This happens all the time," Teng said. "Actually, if you look



Associate Dean of the Morsani College of Medicine Michael Teng believes a South African variant of COVID-19, known as B.1.351, could prove threatening if it reached the U.S., but until then USF's plans for increased in-person classes in Summer B will move forward. SPECIAL TO THE ORACLE

at all the sequences of the viruses that are coming out, every one of them has a few mutations. Most of them don't mean anything, but once in a while, it gets a mutation that allows it to replicate better and those are the ones we worry about."

If people continue to wear masks, physically distance and

receive vaccinations, Teng is confident that no variant will be a threat to the USF community.

"I'm generally kind of a skeptical person, but I am a little bit more optimistic about some semblance of normalcy by the end of the summer or maybe fall [2021]," he said.

OPINION

Education secretary nominee will improve Florida's public schools



Teegan Oshins

STAFF WRITER

President-elect Joe Biden announced his nomination for secretary of education Dec. 22, less than a month before former U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos announced her resignation Jan. 8. The nominee, Miguel Cardona, shows promise in improving the Florida public education system when compared to DeVos.

DeVos has been ridiculed by educators due to her lack of experience in education and her wild claims that occurred throughout her employment, like her suggestion during her confirmation hearing in 2017 that guns are needed in schools to protect against grizzly bears.

"She is out of her league when it comes to knowing and doing what works for public school students," said Lily Eskelsen García, a teacher and the former president of the National Education Association, in 2017.

DeVos has expressed support of allowing educators to carry firearms in schools. In the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in early 2018, the secretary planned to provide Florida public school faculty with guns, which was released in a 2018 White House statement. This was strongly opposed

by García, who said investing in guns would take away from improving educational opportunities that public schools already lack, such as investments in the arts.

In contrast to DeVos, Cardona will be the Florida public school system's savior. As the previous head of the Connecticut public school system and a former educator, according to NPR, he has more experience in education than DeVos.

The most important improvement that Cardona will bring is security in the funding of public schools. DeVos expressed her interest in reallocating funding from public to private schools, proposing a \$8.5 billion cut in 2019. This proposal was accepted with a \$5.6 billion cut, eliminating 8% of the national public school budget in 2020. The Washington Post reported that this money was set to be given to private schools in order to encourage higher enrollment in tuition-based education.

Not only does Cardona hope to prevent the defunding of public schools, but he also prides himself on his work to provide education for students who don't typically have access to resources, like minority or disabled students.

While acting as the Connecticut commissioner of education, Cardona pushed for Connecticut to become the first state to require cultural diversity courses for high school students, according to a 2020 statement by Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont. Cardona has also been endorsed by the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

See EDUCATION on PAGE 18

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A Q&A with Dr. Jay Wolfson

Oracle Editor in Chief Leda Alvim interviewed public health professor and Senior Associate Dean of the Morsani College of Medicine Jay Wolfson about the challenges posed by COVID-19 for the spring semester as well as essential safety precautions to slow down the spread of the virus.



1. What risks do you think the new variant of the virus poses to the community?

We're learning about it every day. It's brand new, we only have ... a few hundred cases of it to look at. We've only known about the core COVID variant since January of last year, and we're still learning about that. So we have to be able to monitor and understand how it works, and whether or not it will be susceptible to this vaccine or whether it's going to pivot again and do something different. The fact is, it's extremely contagious. So it doesn't appear to be any stronger, it doesn't make you any sicker. But it makes more people sicker faster.

2. What does a higher transmissibility rate mean?

If I have a cup of poison, and that cup of poison could make 1,000 people in Hillsborough County very sick, but then I get a different variety of it, and I take one-third of a cup of that poison and it can make

1,000 people, or 2,000 or 3,000 people sick. It's a more powerful poison only in terms of its ability to get into people's bodies and infect them. It doesn't make them any sicker, but it gets more people faster and it spreads more easily. So it requires less exposure. That's why it's dangerous. And again, we're still learning about it, we don't know enough so we're building that airplane as we're flying it.

3. What are some of the dangers associated with noncompliance of the safety protocols, including the use of face coverings and avoiding large crowds, as the new semester starts?

Well, the dangers are especially high because most of our students are fairly young and healthy, and they would be most likely, if they were exposed to and contracted the disease, to have minimal or no symptoms, be asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic, so they wouldn't even know it. And then they could spread it.

So it's not so much that we've had a problem on campus, we've been very good on campus ... But what happens off campus before classes, after classes and on weekends is the great danger. And as you said, our students like to be able to chill out ... [but] this time, we've got a silent, deadly killer. And the silent, deadly, infectious agent that will make a lot of people sick.

The sad part of this, not just for our students but for our community at large, is that it doesn't seem to hit home until somebody has had it come into their life, directly or indirectly because it's invisible.

So, the university is a safe place. We want it to be safe in a lot of ways. It's a safe place for the spread of disease on campus, but it's not being generated on campus. It's being generated off campus and when people do get sick, or if they're asymptomatic and they come into the classroom, even though we're social distancing within the classroom, it increases the risk.

I think we're still doing a really good job of separating folks, checkerboarding people in the classrooms and giving people the option and appropriate classes of doing asynchronous learning, teaching from home if they can until we get a better handle on this disease. Again, we're learning as we're going and whatever we do, we should not imagine that just because there is a vaccine that 'Oh, it's OK now. I don't have to worry now more than any other time.' We have to be even more diligent, more vigilant ... because these next two months are when we project the disease to skyrocket. Then we're in worse trouble than we can imagine so we have to find a way to push

that curve down, and the only way, the only way to do this, which is the very hard way, is through personal discipline and responsibility.

The challenge is that even when we have [a vaccine], we don't know if it is going to confer long-term immunity. So we still have to be careful. This is an alien. This is a creature that has come to us from outer space. It's like it's traveled billions of light years through wormholes, and it's really smart, and it knows how to sneak up on us and change. This COVID thing is like nothing else we've ever had and we have to play by the rules based on how it behaves because it's not going to change this behavior, and it doesn't care if we're older, young, black or green, tall or short. It's going to come into us, it's going to attach to one of our organs and either immediately or sometime in the future is going to erupt and give us respiratory illness, kidney disease, brain disease or heart disease. That's what it's doing. And just being young does not exempt you at all.

4. When do you think the college student age group will get to take the vaccine?

Well, first we have to have enough vaccines. I expect by April to May we'll have enough being produced. We need tens of millions of doses, so by April and May for sure, unless something happens with the production, we should have enough available to begin to vaccinate, but then we have to get over that hump and we have to vaccinate 75% of the population to achieve what we believe to be a successful herd immunity, assuming that the herd immunity lasts.

5. What message do you have for students as they return to campus for the spring semester?

It's not over yet, we're right in the midst of it. Don't imagine that the vaccine, which you don't have access to yet, is going to protect you. The only thing we can do is develop this team spirit and USF has the capacity to organize itself around being a team that's going to protect itself and its community and its family members from this horrible disease, which we're still learning about every day and which is growing and affecting our community. But, it has to be a conscious, intentional, responsible and respectful effort that we engage in. And each one of us, as a student, faculty member and staff member is a member of this team. And while we have to work together, the key is that each one of us has to actively be present and make this happen.

We have to tell ourselves and each other, 'We can do this together.' Because if we don't, the downside is economically, politically, and from a health perspective, horribly devastating. It's our responsibility. If we screw it up, we've screwed it up. Let's get USF, as a major research university, to take the lead and demonstrate that we are one, and we're one not just in terms of sports and academics and research. We're thriving and growing as a community that recognizes that we're on the same team against that enemy which is out to kill us and hurt us, and hurt our families and our communities. The sooner we can do that, the better chance we have of coming through this thing and demonstrating that we really are pretty cool.

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STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

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Dhaad Language Forum (DLF) is an international student organization at the University of South Florida (USF) that offers educational and cultural activities through conversation sessions, lectures, panel discussions, and many other indoor and outdoor social activities. Dhaad language is the alternative name of the Arabic language. This organization is established to help students at USF to:

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No tenured faculty layoff plans in sight despite budget cuts



To maintain reasonable student-to-faculty ratios after the university paused hiring processes across all three campuses, USF President Steven Currall said at the Board of Trustees meeting Friday that the university is exploring all available sources of funding as well as “optimizing” teaching assignments. **SPECIAL TO THE ORACLE/MICROSOFT TEAMS**



Leda Alvim

EDITOR IN CHIEF

The Board of Trustees (BOT) held a Strategic Budget Realignment workshop Friday afternoon to present and discuss the \$36.7 million, or 8.5%, target reduction plan for the 2021-22 fiscal year. As the university prepares to embrace the budget cuts, the risks and impacts of some decisions are becoming even more apparent as the year unfolds.

Across each budgetary unit — university support units, academic support units, academic colleges, USF Health and branch campuses — the university does not expect to lay off any permanent faculty members as it works toward meeting its \$36.7

million budget cut target by July 1, according to USF Provost Ralph Wilcox.

While the university has no layoff plans, Wilcox said there will be a loss of vacant faculty positions, including vacancies created due to early retirement, as well as cuts in temporary visiting instructors and contingent faculty, which include part-time adjuncts and graduate teaching assistants.

This pause in hiring and loss of staff will impact USF’s student-to-faculty ratios across all three campuses, resulting in larger classes and higher instructional workloads for some faculty, according to USF President Steven Currall.

The current student-to-faculty ratio across all three campuses is 21-to-1. Over the last decade, USF’s average student-to-faculty ratio was 28-to-1, according to Wilcox. He said USF’s interim target is to get to 19-to-1 in the next few years.

“We have no intention of sliding backward,” he said. “We will protect

the most research-active and research-intensive professors at the University of South Florida in all of our colleges. What I mean by ‘protect’ is to avoid loading additional students or loading additional class sections on those faculty members.

“So the secret here is not to add to their already high levels of productivity, whether through instruction and student learning or research, but to explore those faculty members that perhaps are not as productive or faculty members who are hired in classifications, in particular instructors that have little or limited research expectations associated with their role. We need to make sure, for instance, that those instructors are being fully utilized through instructional delivery at the university.”

As a way to mitigate the risks of such actions, Currall said the university is exploring all available sources of funding as well as “optimizing” teaching assignments and staff responsibilities.

The university will see an 8.5% cut in its Education and General (E&G) budget. The E&G budget consists of state appropriations, including general, lottery and tuition revenues, according to Senior Vice President of Business and Financial Strategy David Lechner.

The 8.5% cut represents 60% of USF’s total E&G budget. Based on calculations, the university must implement a 5% overall cut of the E&G budget for this coming year, according to Lechner. However, Lechner said there wasn’t a 5% cut across the board.

“Now, we didn’t do 5% ... we didn’t give that across the board,” said Lechner. “These are the targets by unit.

“[The university support units] cuts that we have agreed to here in the first year is about \$6.5 million. And you can see 7.2% of our total E&G budget. The reason that’s a little higher than that 5%, folks, is we had a president that got here in about August of 2019, and I had a little talk about budget, and he got out in front of it, he put his enthusiasm behind it and I communicated to my unit that we needed to be ready to take cuts. So, when COVID hit and all the rest of the state malaise, we were ready.”

Out of USF’s total recurring expenses of \$56.9 million, approximately \$30.8 million still needs to be covered by recurring sources of funding, according to Lechner. To cover those costs, BOT Chairman Jordan Zimmerman said the university can’t use one-time funding, such as stimulus packages like the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to cover those expenses.

The university’s recurring expenses, however, will be taken care of during USF’s second phase. In regard to state funding, Zimmerman

said he doubts the state will restore the university’s funding in 2022.

The university support units’ recommended target for the 2021-22 fiscal year is \$6.5 million, which accounts for 7.2% of the units’ total E&G budget.

As a result of the cuts, there will be a reduction in service levels, personnel and operating funds as well as a reduction in the level of financial, research and compliance oversight, which will consequently decrease the separation of duties and postpone the planned strategic compliance upgrades. Most reductions are already in place, according to Lechner.

The cuts within the university support units will also reduce the capacity for financial, operational and state-required analytics, increase response times for technology support and system upgrades and reduce the capacity for facilities’ upkeep and maintenance.

“We’re gonna have some slowdowns, but we’re gonna continue to try to be responsive,” Lechner said. “We have led as innovators, providing technology tools and analysis that help us to analyze where we are, where we’re going and we’re gonna continue to do that.

“We don’t have [a] budget for deferred maintenance, so facilities [are] going to continue to be a challenge. It has been ever since PECO [Public Education Capital Outlay] went away. But that’s our risks that we have. We’ve made those cuts, we are happy to share. We know where those risks are and we will manage them.”

Academic support units, which encompass Academic Affairs, Decision Support, Graduate Studies, Innovative Education, Libraries, Provost’s Office, Student

■ See BOT on PAGE 17

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PEAK

Continued from PAGE 7

February peak.

“A wave [is predicted to] peak around the end of February, first of March,” said Michael. “With current social measures [in place] it’ll lead to around 18,000 cases at the peak. If the vaccination rates are increased in addition to the social measures, it will result in 14,000 cases at the peak ... and without the vaccines, we would hit 20,000 confirmed cases.”

Hillsborough County reported 85,855 confirmed cases as of Jan. 10, and an estimated 1,119 fatalities, according to Hillsborough County’s COVID-19 Data Dashboard. On Dec. 31 alone, 1,570 new cases were reported, marking it as the county’s highest recorded cases in one day.

The average number of cases in Hillsborough County rose 30.55%

from Nov. 28 to Jan. 3, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“We’re looking at setting records in the state of Florida for the highest number of cases in a single day,” said associate professor in the College of Public Health Jill Roberts.

On the last day of 2020, Florida reported 21,012 coronavirus cases, the highest daily number of cases recorded in the state since the start of the pandemic, according to the Florida Department of Health.

While the rise in the number of COVID-19 cases could be attributed to increased testing, Roberts said it is not the only factor.

“We can actually do the statistics and figure out that it’s not more testing that’s causing [increased positive cases], it’s truly more cases, and this was always expected,” said

Roberts.

These numbers may mark the beginning of trend surges following mass holiday travel, according to Roberts.

“This time of year is the perfect storm, because we have a respiratory-spread virus, which can spread more easily when people are inside. So adding to that, a significant amount of travel [for many reasons including just the holiday season],” Roberts said.

The case count could potentially increase as students return to campus after the holidays.

As of Jan. 10, USF reported 851 cases since the first day of fall classes in August. Of the total reported cases, 713 have been from students while 138 were from faculty and staff.

Despite the surge in the number of cases, Roberts is optimistic that

advances in testing and vaccine rollout will lead to greater control over the pandemic.

“If you look at the fall semester, the rates of positives on campus were actually lower than in the surrounding communities — so we were doing something right,” said Roberts.

In order to maintain this trend into the spring semester, Roberts said students must continue practicing COVID-19 safety measures.

“Students have to be very proactive, and [not be afraid] to say something to their friends who are not following procedures,” said Roberts.



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BOT

Continued from PAGE 13

Success and USF World, will have a \$4.9 million cut for the 2021-22 fiscal year. The target represents 6.1% of the unit's total E&G budget, according to Wilcox.

Among the impacts of the cuts in academic support units, funding for admission and career preparation, as well as central funding for undergraduate and graduate students, will be moved to "other sources." Students and faculty will also have delayed access to selected library periodicals as a result of the budget cuts.

Wilcox said the budget targets for academic support units will "necessitate moving some essential operations to nonstate funding sources." Those funding sources, however, were not specified during the meeting.

Colleges across all three campuses will also be subject to budgetary cuts for the 2021-22 fiscal year. Each college submitted Dec. 18 individual plans according to their own target plans. Of the \$36.7 million in cuts from state funding, \$13.4 million will be taken from colleges.

As USF's biggest college, the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) will have the biggest cut. The college's recommended target for the 2022 fiscal year is \$5.7 million, which is 5.9% of the college's total E&G budget. The college will reduce non-salary operating costs, reorganize and reduce open staff positions, move research faculty to other funding sources and move some of the E&G research costs to F&A.

Besides reducing the number of visiting faculty, which will lead to larger class sections, the college might also suffer from a reduction in tuition revenue and faculty research productivity and a decline in student access for success as well as a higher dependency on contingency instructors to meet the students' demands.

CAS' target for the 2022 fiscal year is \$286,384, which consists of 1.8% of the college's total E&G budget. The

college plans to take savings from the conversion of a 12- to nine-month appointment for the college's former dean and through faculty retirement.

With a reduction in non-salary operating costs and the elimination of vacant positions, the College of Behavioral and Community Science is planning for a \$951,070 budget cut for the 2021-22 fiscal year. The recommended budget cut target consists of 3.7% of the college's total E&G budget.

Amid a decline in student enrollment, the College of Education (COE) was in the spotlight as the university proposed preliminary plans to eliminate some of its undergraduate programs and strengthen its graduate programs. In a letter to the USF community, Wilcox and the college's interim dean Judy Ponticell emphasized how it will continue to offer a "narrower array" of undergraduate programs in higher demand to meet market demands.

Wilcox said the university will also accelerate the search for the COE's next permanent dean as well as work alongside faculty to revise its undergraduate and graduate curriculum and strengthen the support for faculty research.

The COE's budget reduction target for the 2022 fiscal year is \$2.8 million, which makes up 14.7% of the college's total E&G budget. While there won't be any layoffs of permanent faculty, the university expects to reduce the number of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty.

As the COE currently has a student-to-faculty ratio of 11-to-1, Wilcox said the college has a greater efficiency to use state funds. Other colleges' student-to-faculty ratio, including the Muma College of Business, the College of Engineering and the College of Public Health, are three times higher than the COE, according to Wilcox.

Wilcox added the university is also proposing to move the Florida Center for Instructional Technology to Innovative Education, which will provide "some relief" to state funding as it would utilize non-E&G sources



Of the \$36.7 million in cuts from state funding, \$6.5 million will be taken from university support units, \$4.9 million from academic support units, \$13.4 million will be taken from colleges, \$6.9 million from USF Health, \$3.2 million from the St. Pete campus and \$1.9 million from the Sarasota-Manatee campus. ORACLE PHOTO/LEDA ALVIM

of funding.

Considering the high tuition generation, low E&G funding per degree and a high student-to-faculty ratio of 32-to-1 in fall 2020, the College of Engineering's budget cut target for the fiscal year 2022 is \$975,720, which consists of 2.6% of the college's total E&G budget.

The cuts, however, will reduce non-salary operating costs, consequently reducing graduate student support, mentoring and tutoring of students within the college as well as community outreach and marketing. The college will also pause faculty hiring, delay lab renovations and reduce student access to summer school as a result of the budgetary cuts.

Through the elimination of vacant faculty, administrative and staff positions, the College of Marine Science, located on the St. Pete campus, is expected to have a \$312,572 budget cut for the 2022 fiscal year. The budget cut target makes up 4% of the college's total E&G budget.

The cuts, however, will reduce the college's research productivity, according to Wilcox.

For Wilcox, the college is of "high strategic importance to the University of South Florida, particularly in a consolidated context, where the college will serve as an anchor for an interdisciplinary Center of

Oceanographic and Environmental Sciences in St. Petersburg."

With access to philanthropic funds, the Judy Genshaft Honors College's budget cut target for the 2022 fiscal year is \$125,350, which is about 3.4% of the college's total E&G budget. Wilcox said the college has the ability to move some of its expenses from the state budget to philanthropic funds through the USF Foundation.

The Muma College of Business, with a budget cut target of \$1.7 million for the 2022 fiscal year, already has a high student-to-faculty ratio of 33-to-1 in fall 2020 due to the high demand for its programs. The reduction in adjunct faculty will consequently lead to an increase in class sizes as well as in instructional loads for continuing faculty within the college, according to Wilcox.

With the budget cuts target of \$167,696 for the 2022 fiscal year, the Patel College of Global Sustainability might become USF's first centrally privatized college, operating on the basis of tuition and endowment dividends, according to Wilcox.

Wilcox said the college will move faculty and other operating costs to philanthropic sources of funding, which would consequently provide relief state support.

USF Health, consisting of the College of Public Health, College

of Nursing, Morsani College of Medicine and Taneja College of Pharmacy, has a recommended budget cut target of approximately \$7 million, which makes up 8.5% of state appropriation funds.

While USF Health will not have any faculty layoffs, the plan predicts "some" staff layoffs and the elimination of vacant positions. The plan also projects a reduction in discretionary expenses, a shift of E&G expenses to other sources of funding and reduced reserves for the 2022 fiscal year.

USF Health also plans to expand and diversify its research portfolio, which may lead to an increase in revenues in the future.

As for the branch campuses, each submitted its individual targets for the 2022 fiscal year. The St. Pete campus has a budget cut target of \$3.2 million while the Sarasota-Manatee campus has a target of \$1.9 million.

The BOT is set to approve the budget cut recommendations Jan. 12, during its board meeting.

Between May and June, the university will bring the 2023 fiscal year implementation plan and budget to the BOT. The board will then approve the strategic plan June 8.

The cuts will be effective July 1, the start of the 2022 fiscal year.

EDUCATION

Continued from PAGE 9

Cardona will hold schools responsible for misuse of funds as he did in February 2020 when charter schools in his home state were violating state law, according to the New Haven Independent.

His past achievements will benefit Florida, since the state's education system has been critiqued in the past for its lack of initiative in cultural education and disability access, having been ranked 29th by U.S. Today in its 2018 analysis of best public schools by state.

DeVos has encouraged educators to endorse the privatization of public schools, which would further the gap of education access between economic classes. She has been a plague to the American public school system, and Cardona is bound to be an improvement.

DeVos has profited off of student loan debt, which has increased significantly since her confirmation in 2017, by having a financial stake in a company that collected student loans, according to The Washington Post. She also invested in for-profit universities, making it obvious that she has profited off of the privatization of public schools and the increase in enrollment at private schools and for-profit universities.

Florida is in need of a secretary of education who will do what is best for students and not what is best for their financial interests in tuition-based education, as DeVos did the past four years. Cardona's priorities as an educator and leader qualify him to better public schools across the nation.

Teagan Oshins is a junior majoring in art history.

SPRING

Continued from PAGE 7

If a student living on campus tests positive for COVID-19, isolation operations will remain the same as they were in the fall, with students required to isolate at on-campus isolation spaces located in the Cypress Suites residence halls for 10 to 14 days. If a student tests positive, they are relocated to their isolation space the same day of their positive test result and are given two hours to pack their essential belongings.

When in isolation on campus, students are not allowed to leave their isolation spaces at any time unless they have been authorized to do so or have been cleared by SHS.

"We had great success with regard to the control of the spread of the virus within the residential community, and so we're going to continue on with that process as we had in the fall semester," said Hernandez.

With many returning from holiday travels, on-campus residents are not the only ones that USF is trying to keep track of.

The Return to Campus Assessment will now ask more descriptive questions to determine how many people will be visiting campus and how often. The questionnaire asks for information like the intention to visit campus regularly, remaining off campus for the entire semester, intending to visit campus fewer than four times a month and intending to visit rarely or on an as-needed basis.

In the fall semester, the assessment merely asked if students, faculty or staff were returning to campus at all.

Petersen said the questions more accurately reflect how often someone is visiting campus, narrowing down the amount of Daily Symptom Check reminders to those who are coming to campus on a regular basis. Someone who's coming to campus on a regular

basis is someone who's visiting at least once a week, according to Petersen.

While some students might not plan to visit campus on a regular basis, Petersen said they are still encouraged to complete the Daily Symptom Check, which also looks different this semester. Even if someone answers that they won't be visiting campus that day, the questionnaire will still ask if the person has been experiencing COVID-19 symptoms or if they think they've been exposed to the virus.

"Even if you're not coming to campus, we care about you and we want to know what's going on and we want to be supportive and helpful," said Petersen. "Also, quite frankly, just because you didn't come to campus on Friday, maybe you were on campus Thursday and might have been infected with the virus and not known it so it really helps in our risk assessment."

Petersen also hopes to see more enforcement of the CampusPass for those on campus, the QR code given to students and employees allowed on campus after completing their Daily Symptom Check.

"We are going to be asking, I hope, more routinely to see the CampusPass because that's half the point," said Petersen.

Currently, the facilities that require the CampusPass to enter are the USF Libraries, the Campus Recreation Center, the Fit and Riverfront Park, which will also look slightly different in the spring semester.

The libraries' COVID-19 mitigation measures will remain in full effect for spring, according to USF Libraries Dean Todd Chavez, including showing the CampusPass upon entering the building, seat reservations, face coverings, social distancing and shortened hours compared to pre-COVID-19 operations.

However, the Tampa campus'



With the vaccine rollout, Petersen said the university could move into Phase III during Summer B. ORACLE PHOTO/ LEDA ALVIM

library will be open slightly more than it was last semester, with an 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. window Monday through Thursday compared to the 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. schedule in the fall. The Tampa library will also be open Sundays from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m.

USF Recreation and Wellness facilities will also maintain previous COVID-19 mitigation strategies, including the required CampusPass upon entrance, face coverings at all times, social distancing and a reservations system.

Director of Recreation and Wellness Jay Souza said the department's current strategies will be extended as it begins providing some in-person group fitness classes, such as yoga and cycling, starting Monday. While in-person group fitness classes have not been hosted since

March, Recreation and Wellness will start offering them under a strict capacity of nine participants per class with one instructor.

Although the changes are minimal, it makes the spring semester appear just a bit different than the last.

"Believe me, we're all as eager as you are to not be doing this," said Petersen. "But we have to do whatever we do as safely as we can."



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