

SHS sees increased wait times, appointments due to variant spread

By Kellie Murray
STAFF WRITER

The omicron variant has posed new challenges for Student Health Services (SHS) as an influx of students are making appointments to get tested when they show any form of COVID-19-related symptoms.

The increase can be attributed to concerns over the new variant. Students who even have a mild cold are likely to get tested for COVID-19 at SHS, College of Public Health Dean Donna Petersen said.

“It might be strep, it might be flu, it might be COVID-19 or it might just be a cold, but there are students showing up



The current surge in student appointments is the largest increase of the pandemic, according to USF Health experts. ORACLE PHOTO

just wanting to be tested, because they're concerned or they believe they might have been exposed," said Petersen.

Roughly 150-200 students are tested daily at USF, according to SHS Executive Director Joseph Puccio.

The flu is another major concern at SHS as flu cases are rising as well, Petersen said. In years past, less students went to

SHS to seek care for the cold or the flu, but with growing COVID-19-related concerns, more students are making appointments to get tested or be treated.

Petersen said that since it can be difficult to tell what symptoms of sickness are, students make an appointment at SHS to ensure it is not COVID-19, causing a large increase in attendance.

“There's a lot of students not feeling well and probably seeking care that they might not have bothered about pre-COVID,” said Petersen.

Many of the appointments being filled up are also for

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Sean Agustin: Redefining the SunDolls



Alberto Camargo

ASSISTANT SPORTS
EDITOR

Amid the flashing lights, thumping music and fanfare of USF Athletic events is the official USF dance team, the SunDolls, who have been a fixture of the spectacle since its inception in 1997.

For the first 24 years of its history, the SunDolls were an all-female team. That is until 2021 when the first 'SunDude,' freshman Sean Agustin, burst through the door to his own beat.

“When I [first became aware of] the SunDolls, I did research on it,” Agustin said. “It said on the website ‘an all-girls dance team,’ so I didn't think I was going to make it. But my family and friends from back home told me to just do it. And I made the team.”

With 15 years of dance experience in genres such as jazz and hip hop under his belt,

Agustin is long past any feelings of not belonging or being out of his element.

“I grew up as the only guy in my dance studio,” he said. “So, [by the time I joined the SunDolls], I was pretty used to it.”

When he's not starring in halftime shows or putting in work in the studio, Agustin is studying toward a degree in biology. However, he has no plans of choosing one over the other, instead hoping to teach dance while also becoming a chiropractor.

■ See SUNDUDE on PAGE 3



Sean Agustin is the first male member of the USF SunDolls in its 25-year history. ORACLE PHOTO/FRANCISCO ROSA

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The Oracle will correct or clarify factual errors. Email Editor in Chief Alexandra Urban at oracleeditor@gmail.com.



USF Health experts say they are seeing less students return for follow-up appointments due to the availability of the vaccine. ORACLE PHOTO/LEDA ALVIM

SHS

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students getting the vaccine or booster, which takes up part of the staff and the space, according to Petersen.

She said SHS accommodates as many students as possible with the staff, which is an average of 13 providers at a time, and space it has.

“We are seeing the vast majority of patients for COVID or other general illnesses same day or the next day and we increased appointment capacity by 45% to assist in caring for the COVID surge,” said Puccio.

Before the increase, the appointment capacity averaged at 250-275 patients a day.

“Most patients are being scheduled for telehealth appointments the same day or next day. Some services that are

not COVID related and are not urgent are being seen within 24-48 [hours],” said Puccio.

Procedures that are not urgent are being delayed three to four days, but urgent services are still being seen the same day, according to Puccio.

One positive is the notion that many students don’t need to schedule as many follow-up appointments due to the advantage brought by the COVID-19 vaccines, he said. This helps with continuing the flow of helping students who make new appointments, allowing SHS to help as many people as they can.

“This is much busier than a normal cold and flu season and busier than last year’s COVID surges,” he said. “Luckily, vaccinated students do not seem to be as sick as unvaccinated students and therefore do not require as many follow up

appointments as were needed last year thus currently enabling SHS to see more unique patient encounters.”

Due to the high demand for appointments, SHS prefers for students to make an appointment by calling or filling out the online form.

“They’re doing their best to accommodate everybody, but people just walking up [wasn’t a problem] prior to omicron,” she said. “Omicron just really changed the landscape because there are just so many positive cases that it’s just challenging, so they really are asking people to make appointments.”

SUNDUDE

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Agustin has been a part of the team since May 2021, weeks before graduating high school.

In circumstances where a heavily-rehearsed and choreographed sport like dance might suffer, Agustin took advantage of the virtual auditions brought on by the pandemic by perfecting his routine.

What stood out about Agustin was not the novelty of a male student auditioning for the all-girls group, but his dance technique, versatility and sheer charisma that bled through the screen.

“Literally the first time I opened his audition videos, I was like ‘Oh my god, yes. No question [about it],” coach Jada Davis said. “I can always count on him to give 110%, like the full experience. Not just dancing, but facials, attitude, all of that.”

Junior Savannah Sides, one of four team captains, revealed there had been previous interest from other male students in joining the ranks of the SunDolls.

To the rest of his team, Agustin is more than just the first SunDude, he is essential to the group.

“We don’t see [Sean] as a guy on the team,” Sides said. “We see him as a strong, amazing dancer and an awesome teammate.”

Despite the abundance of questions and unknowns that come with being the first SunDude, the toughest barrier to break was purely cosmetic, according to Davis.

“[Getting Sean] a uniform was the biggest challenge,” she said. “[The supplier] didn’t have the materials or options for him. And I’m like ‘Well I need you

guys to catch up, because [Sean] needs his stuff.”

When Agustin and the SunDolls take center stage for their routine, he might draw attention as the only member clad in a T-shirt and shorts rather than a crop top and skirt, but once the music starts, he becomes a seamless part of the team.

“[Sean] does a really, really good job of just fitting in and dancing like us and not standing out in a way that’s eye-catching in a bad way,” Sides said. “He’s eye-catching in such a good way, his energy is off the charts.”

With the combination of his raw ability and charisma, Agustin has not only been blending in with the SunDolls, he’s been standing out to those watching him perform.

Agustin’s talent has caught the attention of plenty around the community, according to Sides, who is proud of what this could mean for the future of the team.

“The amount of people that have come to me this year [about him is incredible],” she said. “They’re like, that guy is amazing. So I’m very optimistic that people that have always considered maybe trying out for the team but didn’t have the courage to be the first [SunDude] will see [Sean] and see that he’s paving the way for them in the future.”

Although he may not see himself as a trendsetter, Agustin is aware that his presence on the team gives him a platform for others to follow in his footsteps.

“[We look for] a strong dancer, technique-wise,” Sides said. “If you’re a good teammate, regardless of gender, you deserve to be on this team.”

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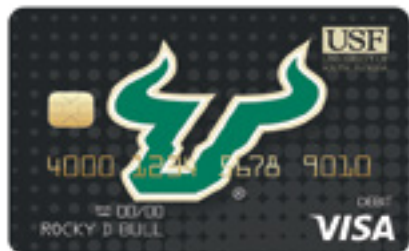
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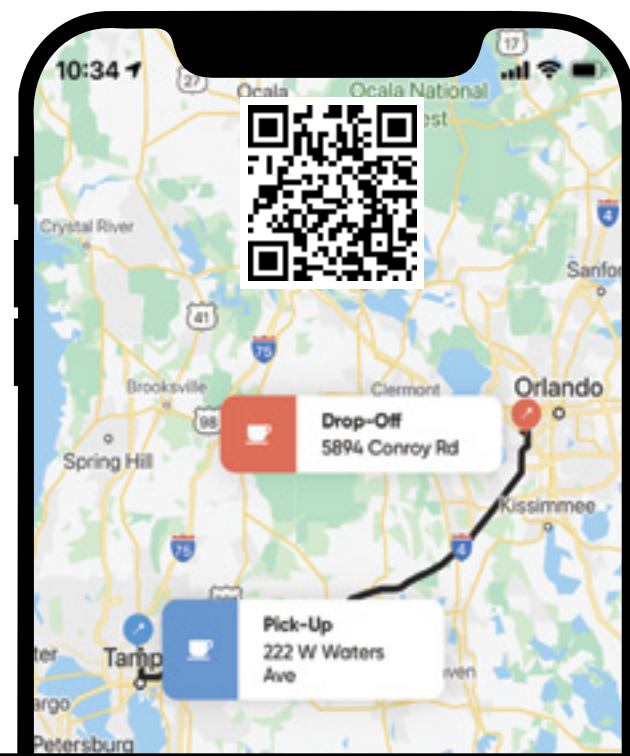


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Mandatory face-to-face learning is premature, but inevitable for the future

By Neel Kulkarni
CORRESPONDENT

During the first week of classes, professors have expressed concerns about the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, according to a Jan. 10 article from The Oracle.

Despite these reservations, it's time to plan for face-to-face learning mandates if the pandemic's death toll ceases to drastically rise.

In the last 14 days, the number of reported COVID-19 cases in Florida has increased by 35% to an average of over 58,000 cases per day, according to data from The New York Times. This trend is worrying as the death rate for the omicron variant is unknown.

Previous COVID-19 deaths in Florida have peaked about 15-30 days after new cases, according to The New York Times. This trend has only been observed with the delta variant, as the number of omicron cases have not yet peaked.

The omicron variant is unlikely to have as drastic an impact as the COVID-19 delta variant in terms of death rate due to its lower risk of hospitalization.

"All indications point to a lesser severity of omicron versus delta," said the president's Chief Medical Advisor Anthony Fauci during a press briefing Dec. 29.

Fauci went on to say the lessened severity may be a result of population immunity or lower virulence of omicron.

If Florida fails to count a surge in COVID-19 deaths following the peak of new omicron cases, the variant doesn't pose a high



Faculty are right to question USF's decision to require in-person learning, but nationwide mandates of face-to-face learning may follow the end of the pandemic. SPECIAL TO THE ORACLE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

enough risk to the population to encourage virtual learning, and in-person instruction mandates should be installed.

Once infection and death rates stabilize, there is little the government can do to prevent contraction of the disease. Students will still be able to wear a mask and get vaccinated to reduce risk, but a low death rate and high population immunity would mean strong government intervention is unlikely to cause significant changes.

At this point, public risk of COVID-19 is better understood and more predictable, so it's in the best interest of universities and school districts to mandate face-to-face learning.

In K-12 learning environments, this would encourage socialization. At the university

level, a face-to-face learning mandate would offer students some security that courses will be offered in person and will not be handled at the discretion of professors.

The severity of current COVID-19 cases cannot be overlooked in preparation for a post-pandemic future, but if a wave of COVID-19 deaths does not follow the ongoing surge of omicron cases, mandated face-to-face learning should be a step in a return to normality.

Neel Kulkarni is a senior studying biomedical science.

Florida abortion bill ignores civil liberty

By Marcelene Pilcher
OPINION CO-EDITOR

The Florida House of Representatives had its first reading of HB 5 on Jan. 11. This bill — along with its Senate counterpart SBI46 — would serve as a statewide abortion ban after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

HB 5 is an invasion of civil liberty and unjustly applies personal ideology to medical care. Florida constituents must implore their representatives to fight for American freedom.

The bill — filed by Representatives Erin Grall and Kelli Stargel — would ban abortion of a fetus over 15 weeks unless two doctors agree there is an abnormality fatal to the fetus or mother, similar to the Texas Heartbeat Bill passed in May 2021. There are no exceptions for rape or incest.

Roe v. Wade (1973) is the landmark Supreme Court decision regarding abortion, and the legal precedent for this debate. The court found the U.S. Constitution protects a woman's right to have an abortion without excessive government restriction.

The court held that in most cases, restriction of abortion violates a person's constitutional Right of Privacy, which is guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

As such, HB 5, while not outright banning abortion, encroaches on the decidedly constitutional right of a person to choose, and is an attempt to sidestep legal precedent and the court's interpretation of The Constitution.

Supporters of this bill argue that it supports life, and that fetuses are aware and can feel pain.

"I have not seen that particular [bill], but obviously I'm supportive of 15 weeks. I think that's very reasonable and I think that's very consistent with being supportive of protecting life," said Gov. Ron DeSantis in a Jan. 12 press conference.

The beginning of life is an ideological debate, and as such is difficult to apply to legislation without encroaching on the beliefs and personal freedoms of others.

The conclusion widely agreed upon in the medical community, stemming from a 2009 study by pediatric researchers Hugo Lagercrantz and Jean-Pierre Changeux, is that fetuses begin to gain consciousness as early as 24 weeks. This is also the current cutoff for abortions in Florida.

Medical legislation should be based in scientific research, not in the popular opinion of ideological debate.

As the constituents of Florida, it's crucial that we reach out to our local representatives and speak out against the impediment of personal freedom in our state. Popular ideology cannot trump individual freedom.

Marcelene Pilcher is a junior studying integrated public relations and advertising.

HOCKEY

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club that I don't know where I'd be without it."

Senior defenseman Scot Nelson has been part of club hockey since he arrived at USF and it has been extremely valuable to him. As team captain, he has prioritized not only performing on the ice, but also fostering group chemistry away from it.

"[There is a focus on] off-ice bonding. Whether it is a road trip or an off weekend, our team has a lot of fun together and we all get along really well," he said. "I've been playing hockey pretty much my whole life and I've never seen a team bond and gel together quite like this one."

The bond and sense of community is also felt by those who work in the team operations, media and content creation.

The Ice Bulls host an in-house team to conduct their broadcasting and media, allowing students to gain significant experience in different positions for their aspiring careers in the industry.

Junior Matthew Perry is aiming for a career in play-by-play announcing, and the chance

to sharpen his skills in hockey was one he couldn't pass up.

"It's been an opportunity that I'm very grateful for," he said. "Before USF hockey, I had never called a hockey game before, just baseball and softball. Hockey is one of my favorite sports, so it's been really fun getting to learn a different aspect of sports broadcasting, especially through a game I'm very passionate about."

Away from the microphone, junior Alexa Hilston is the creative source behind the team's social media graphics.

"I am entirely self-taught in graphic design," she said. "[So working for the Ice Bulls ensures] that my graphic design skills are where they need to be. I like to model [my work] after the [Tampa Bay Lightning] and other NHL teams' [graphic design], so just having this opportunity to keep doing something I love as well as continuing just to build my skills [is great]."

Sitting on the other side of the glass surrounding the rink are a fervent group of fans who bring a palpable electricity to each home game at AdventHealth Center Ice.

Senior Madison Huneke

appreciates the unique atmosphere at home games, something she believes is not replicated at other USF sports.

"[Fans are more involved at hockey games] than the football games because there's just more of an energy-based connection with the team," she said. "It's very enjoyable at the football games, but there's a lot more of a fanbase and energy at a hockey game."

Even after leaving the friendly confines of the arena, fans become friends around campus with a unique connection.

"USF Hockey has had a very big impact on my time [at USF] because I've met tons of people that I've carried friendships with," Huneke said. "I'm still friends with a bunch of [fans] I've met and we all just kind of know each other. It's kind of like a little family."

The Ice Bulls may not be a Division I team just yet, but its impact on lives, careers and school spirit brings together all kinds of people in the USF community.

USF Club Hockey's next home game is scheduled for Jan. 28 hosting Delaware at 7 p.m.

TULSA

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five games, four of which came in conference play.

Against Tulsa, the Bulls will look to take much better care of the basketball than they did Sunday when they turned the ball over a season-high 19 times, which directly led to 12 UCF points.

Unfortunately, for coach Jose Fernandez's team, the Golden Hurricane are one of the best in the conference in turnover margin. They have a +4.79 turnover margin, second in the AAC, forcing an average of 16 turnovers per game.

They are also the top-ranked team in the AAC in assist/turnover ratio.

In addition to ball security, the Bulls have to try to stop a Tulsa offense that tops the conference in multiple statistical categories this season.

The Golden Hurricane rank as the best team in scoring offense, averaging 74.7 points per game, as well as scoring margin (+13.6), field goal percentage (45.1%) and three-point percentage (40.7%).

They are led by a trio of double-digit scorers in Wyvette Mayberry, who's averaging 14.1 points per game, Temira Poindexter (11.9) and Rebecca Lescay (10).

Freshman guard Delanie Crawford has also made an immediate impact in her short career averaging nine points and five rebounds per contest.

Mayberry returns to Tulsa following a superb freshman season last year in which she was named to the AAC All-Freshman Team after averaging 12.3 points and 3.5 rebounds. She recently tied her career-high 24 points in Tulsa's win against East Carolina on Jan. 11.

Where the scales start to tip in USF's favor are in their experience, defense and rebounding.

With the exception of senior guards Maddie Bittle and Lescay, most of Tulsa's starting five is composed of first or second-year players.

Meanwhile, USF's entire starting five is made up of players who have played at least three years of college basketball, including two fifth-year players in forwards Bethy Mununga and Dulcy Fankam Mendjiadeu.

Both Mununga and Mendjiadeu will be key for the Bulls if they are going to come out on top against Tulsa as they are at the heart of USF's defensive and rebounding efforts.

USF is the top-ranked team in the AAC in defensive rebounding, third in rebounding margin and sixth in offensive rebounding, all of which rank ahead of Tulsa. Mununga leads the charge for the Bulls grabbing 11.8 boards per game with Mendjiadeu ranking second on the team with 6.4.

The two forwards have been on a bit of a tear over USF's last few games, leading the team in scoring and rebounding in their Jan. 12 win against Tulane and the loss against UCF.

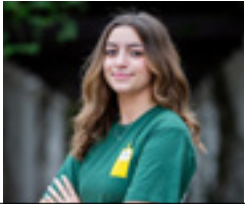
In order to exploit Tulsa's weaknesses, expect a healthy serving of Mununga and Mendjiadeu throughout the contest.

The Bulls will meet the Golden Wave in a 7 p.m. tipoff streamed on ESPN+ and iHeartRadio Bulls Unlimited.



Defenseman Scot Nelson scored the game-winning goal in a 6-5 overtime win against UCF in the War on I-4 on Nov. 14. SPECIAL TO THE ORACLE/XOE BERGMAN

A grounded community on ice



Lanie De La Milera

STAFF WRITER

The rumbling of palms crashing against the glass drowns out chants of “Go Bulls,” contributing to the atmosphere inside the arena at a USF club hockey game.

The Ice Bulls (8-8-1) have carved out a tight-knit community within the USF student body, and not just for those who wear the skates, but for fans and others involved with the club on a day-to-day basis.

For the student-athletes, it not only gives them an opportunity to play the sport they love, but make long-lasting connections



The Ice Bulls faced their fiercest rival, the University of Tampa Spartans, at Amalie Arena on Sunday. SPECIAL TO THE ORACLE/XOE BERGMAN

that will extend beyond their playing days.

“It’s allowed me to make a lot of new friends since it’s my first year,” said freshman defenseman Owen Welch. “So it gave me that

opportunity to meet some new people.”

For others, like senior forward Ivan Bronnikov from Russia, the team aids in adjusting to such a drastic change of scenery from

their lives before college by providing a sense of family.

“First of all, it’s a team and everybody supports each other in the worst moments and in the best moments,” he said. “I

feel like that’s pretty much what family is about, and being away from home obviously. It’s not that easy, but [I’ve found a] substitute for a family with these boys.”

In his five years on the roster, graduate student forward and alternate captain Kenneth Weightman created everlasting experiences and relationships with his teammates.

“Being a part of the USF ice hockey club is one of the highlights of my college experience,” he said. “I’ve had so much fun, great times and great memories with this club. Moving down from [New Jersey], this club gave me a great group of friends that I have bonded with since the first week of my freshman year. I wouldn’t trade this group of friends I have made for anything in the world.

“I have had so many opportunities because of the people I have met through this

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Bulls look to bounce back against Tulsa



Francisco Rosa

SPORTS EDITOR

Following its worst loss of the season at the hands of UCF on Sunday, USF women’s basketball will look to get back on track as



USF senior forward Dulcy Fankam Mendjiadeu led the Bulls in scoring with 14 points in the loss against UCF on Sunday. USF ATHLETICS PHOTO

they continue conference play against Tulsa on Wednesday.

The Bulls (12-5, 2-1 AAC) welcome the Golden Hurricane (12-2, 2-1 AAC) to the Yuengling Center for their first home game since Dec. 29 against Jacksonville.

USF dropped out of the AP Top 25 rankings for the first time this season after the 67-51 defeat to the Knights. The Bulls were ranked among the best squads in the nation since the preseason and reached as high as No. 13 in

the fourth week of the season.

USF has already lost more games in 2021-22 than they did over the entirety of last year (4).

After finishing in the bottom half of the conference last season, the Golden Hurricane are off to an impressive start under first-time coach Angie Nelp.

Tulsa’s program has seen a vast improvement under Nelp who has already helped the team surpass last season’s win total of

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