

Proposition: 04-20/21

Title: A Memorial requesting that NMSU Central Administration includes the Faculty Senate in designing and implementing a sentinel testing program for COVID-19.

Date Submitted: Submitted 08/24/2020, revised 09/01/2020

Sponsor(s): S Hanson (ACES), Erik Lehnhoff (ACES), Christopher Brown (A&S), Michaela Burkardt (ACES),

Deleted: ,

Proposed Committee: N/A. We request that this be handled as emergency legislation

Assigned Committee: N/A. We request that this be handled as emergency legislation

Prior Approvals: N/A. We request that this be handled as emergency legislation

Proposal Type (please check one):

- Memorial
- Proposition to change policy (please include ARP/RPM reference(s) from <https://arp.nmsu.edu/>)
- Proposition for curriculum addition/change (please include all curriculum change forms and signature pages as outlined here: <https://provost.nmsu.edu/forms/>)
- Other (please describe below)

Background and rationale:

NMSU is a caring community that seeks to protect the health and well-being of students, faculty, and staff while providing the highest quality academic experience possible for its student. Many members of the NMSU faculty have substantial experience in areas related to the pandemic, and they are eager to contribute in a number of ways in order to help NMSU administration achieve its goals while meeting the challenges imposed by COVID-19. NMSU is also a community that espouses the ideals of faculty involvement through shared governance, transparency, and inclusion. Being both stakeholders in the community affected by COVID-19 and having expertise relevant to the topic, the Faculty Senate request to be more engaged in the development and implementation of COVID-19 measures within the NMSU community.

Given that approximately 40% of infected people will never show symptoms and that about 50% of transmission occurs from asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals (CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/planning-scenarios.html>) this group is a large driving force of the pandemic. Younger healthier individuals who may have higher risk social tendencies, like students, are likely to exceed these averages. College campuses are therefore environments at risk for significant surges of COVID-19 to occur “under the radar”. While self-check and self-referral for testing among those experiencing symptoms are prudent and well intentioned, these passive measures will miss a large number of asymptomatic carriers who are likely to spread COVID-19 through the campus community. Data from testing within the NMSU Athletic Department supports this supposition.

Frequent testing of all individuals within a population would be the ideal course in a perfect world. Real world testing capacity and resource constraints make this difficult, however, especially for NMSU while it faces its current budget challenges. Sentinel screening is a system where small representative samples from a population are tested, usually on a voluntary basis (please see WHO guidelines at: https://www.who.int/immunization/monitoring_surveillance/burden/vpd/surveillance_type/sentinel/en/). While sentinel screening will not identify all infected individuals in a group, it does return highly valuable data, especially including a test positivity rate (the percentage of positive tests out of the number tested). Comparing the test positivity rate with the rate of symptomatic individuals in a given population provides an estimate of what proportion of infected individuals in a given population are likely to be asymptomatic carriers. Further, tracking changes in the test positivity rate over time allows early detection of COVID-19 surges in a given population. Surges that may not otherwise become apparent until weeks later when increases in the number of people suffering symptomatic infections and adverse outcomes becomes apparent. Recent advances in testing, including less invasive saliva tests that also return same day results, are making sentinel systems easier to implement with more buy-in from communities they are being used to serve.

Many entities, including other universities, are engaging in and benefitting from rationally designed active surveillance / sentinel screening programs. The value of this type of surveillance has been recognized in New Mexico. In her weekly COVID-19 briefing on August 27, 2020, Governor Lujan-Grisham indicated that NM-PED is directing public school systems to implement sentinel testing programs to protect students, teachers, and staff as public schools resuming in-person attendance.

It should be noted that sentinel surveillance programs also have significant value that justifies their cost even when COVID-19 surges do not occur. In the absence of significant campus community spread, the data will show stable or declining test positivity rates over time. And these data would

provide strong, data backed, justification for continuing current operating practices such as in person return to work and class. These data would also inspire confidence in NMSU's COVID-19 response throughout the NMSU community, the surrounding communities, as well as state government officials.

While the public messaging to date has focused on self-checks and self-referral for testing if symptoms are experienced, the NMSU community recently learned (many via news media) that NMSU is developing an active screening / sentinel surveillance type of program. While details of the program are not widely known, the Faculty Senate lauds this effort as a strong compliment to the self-check / reporting that has been encouraged to date. The Faculty Senate, being an information conduit between the Administration and the faculty, is eager to participate in discussions regarding how testing will be conducted, how the information will be shared, and how results from testing will be used to guide NMSU operations.

Proposition:

The faculty of NMSU are committed to maintaining the well-being of the campus community and the reputation of NMSU. The NMSU faculty also have a commitment and responsibility for shared governance to help NMSU meet the challenges it faces.

Recognizing the benefits that active / sentinel type surveillance measures can provide to NMSU, and the relevant collective experience that the NMSU faculty are eager to share, the Faculty Senate hereby requests that NMSU Administration engages the expertise of its faculty in development and implementation of an active screening / sentinel surveillance program for COVID-19. The goal of the screening should be to determine weekly test positivity rates for students, faculty, and staff, with these data being shared with the entire NMSU community. The Faculty Senate further requests that the faculty be included in discussing and formulating operational changes that may result from testing results.