

Oppose the unsafe reopening of New York University!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at NYU
8 September 2020

On Wednesday, September 2, New York University (NYU), guided not by an adherence to the latest scientific research but by the interests of private profit, officially opened its doors. The university is endangering the lives of not only thousands of students, faculty, and staff, but countless New York City residents. Over 10,000 students, faculty and staff have been tested for COVID-19 and are now returning to the buildings and classrooms.

The push for the reopening of NYU is part of the broader homicidal back-to-work campaign by the ruling class. This policy has already resulted in the infection of over 6 million people and almost 200,000 deaths in the US alone. Over 30,000 people are becoming sick every day and, according to the Institute of Health Metrics at the University of Washington, if the rate of the virus's spread increases, the death toll could reach 410,000 by the end of the year.

Following the handout of trillions of dollars to Wall Street with the CARES Act, the ruling class is now pushing for a premature reopening of schools so that the parents of children can be forced back to work. The reopening of schools, including of the New York City public school system, the largest in the country, threatens to further accelerate the spread of the pandemic.

In New York, NYU has been at the forefront of the relentless campaign to reopen colleges in the fall since mid-March. To ensure the resumption of in-person work and study, the university has dedicated the last several months to promoting its "safety" plan, launched under the title "NYU Returns," as a sophisticated, responsible, scientifically-approved plan that will ensure the health and safety of the city population as a whole.

In reality, "NYU Returns" is a ruthless, pseudo-scientific initiative that accepts the inevitability of infection and therefore death. The real goal of the plan is to clear NYU of any responsibility for an outbreak of COVID-19 and exempt it from having to reimburse

tuition by placing all the blame on students, faculty and staff.

Plastered across the university's website is the tagline, "Keep Each Other Safe" with an emphasis on "the importance of individual and collective responsibility." Statements stressing that "each student, faculty member, staff member, and administrator makes a significant impact on the well-being of the entire NYU community by wearing a mask, by complying with physical distancing, and by practicing good hand hygiene" are included in almost every communication sent from university administrators.

Since the university reopened, 20 students have been suspended for failing to adhere to NYU's safety guidelines. Announcing the suspensions to the community, NYU wrote, "Schools are having to pivot away from in-person instruction or close due to COVID-19 outbreaks on campus. These outbreaks have been largely attributed to social gatherings off-campus or in crowded bars and clubs... It took so much work to get here. Please don't be the one who causes NYU to close."

The university also demands that students inform on any of their peers who commit any violation of the rules, no matter how insignificant. This serves no purpose other than providing NYU with more scapegoats.

Over 2,600 undergraduate students are back in the dorms. During their mandatory quarantine, NYU, which charges over \$76,000 for tuition, housing and meals every year, did not even provide them with adequate meals. Videos on the social media platform TikTok showed students having to share their meals, provoking outrage across the country.

The university also tried to force all teaching assistants back into the classrooms by banning international students, who are based abroad, from teaching remotely. NYU was forced to reverse this decision amidst overwhelming opposition from students and faculty.

Over the past month, the decision to reopen under conditions where COVID-19 is ripping through the population has proven disastrous. Many major colleges, including the University of Iowa, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Notre Dame, Princeton, the University of Southern California and the University of Alabama, have been forced to revert to online instruction after hundreds of students, staff and faculty were infected with the virus.

Most recently, State University of New York (SUNY) at Oneonta, after fully reopening with in-person classes, was forced to send students home for the rest of the fall semester after 300 students tested positive for COVID-19 within four days, one of the largest outbreaks in New York state in recent months.

Under these conditions, the push by NYU to reopen under a so-called “hybrid” model is nothing short of criminal. The primary motivation behind the reopening is to maintain the profits generated by the university.

NYU is one of the most expensive universities in the country and takes in hundreds of millions of dollars annually, charging most students over \$53,000 for tuition and mandatory fees alone. These costs have only increased over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. In June, it was reported that NYU was raising the price of 12 to 18 credits for undergraduate students by over \$700. Despite the drop in enrollment, the university will still be able to rake in a hefty sum.

These policies are not an accident nor the result of bad decision-making. NYU embodies the broader subordination of academia to private profit and the political interests of the ruling class. The university’s board of trustees includes several multi-billionaires and millionaires. The university also has extensive ties to the agencies of the US military and state apparatus.

The same class and political interests that underlie NYU’s decision to reopen also stand behind the administration’s ever more aggressive promotion of racial politics. Over the summer, the administration, working together with a small student-led-task force, began planning for racially-segregated housing in university dorms. The planned “themed floor” that the university seeks to implement will be “completely comprised of Black-identifying students with Black Resident Assistants.”

While Trump and the Republicans openly use racist and fascistic rhetoric, the Democrats promote racial and identity politics, claiming that the fundamental division in American society is between “white America” and “black

America.” Both factions of the ruling class stoke racial and ethnic divisions to divide the working class and obscure the fact that they are implementing a policy that is directed at workers and youth of all races and ethnicities.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth and student section of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), fights for the unity of all workers and youth across racial, ethnic and national lines. The coronavirus pandemic has completely exposed the capitalist system, which has proven incapable of dealing with a pandemic in a scientific way and has sacrificed the lives of millions to the altar of profit.

The reopening of colleges and schools poses a direct threat to the lives and well-being of hundreds of thousands of teachers, students and parents. It can only be opposed through the revolutionary mobilization of an internationally unified working class on a socialist basis, independent of the trade unions and Democratic Party.

Workers and youth internationally are taking the first critical step in this struggle. Rank-and-file safety committees, independent of all bourgeois parties and their obedient servants in the trade unions, are being established in schools and factories and are fighting to prepare workers in all industries for a nationwide general strike to save lives. We are calling upon students, faculty, and staff at NYU to follow these examples and fight to establish rank-and-file safety committees of their own.

Most importantly, we urge all youth and students who are ready to take up the fight for socialism to contact us today and join our club at NYU.

We urge students and youth in the New York area to register for our upcoming meeting: “Oppose the unsafe reopening of schools and colleges: A socialist response to the pandemic” which will be held online on Sep 16, 2020 6:30 PM EDT.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact