

Infected students denounce administration guidelines, amidst rising COVID-19 cases at Southern California universities

Melody Isley, Emiri Ochiai
12 September 2020

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality in the US is holding an online meeting Thursday at 5 PM Pacific to organize students against the reckless reopening of schools. We urge students and youth to register for the event today and help us build for the meeting.

The reckless and deadly drive to resume in-person classes at universities has already resulted in over 51,000 positive cases of COVID-19, spanning at least a thousand universities. In California, despite reporting 4,800 new cases each day, many universities are still offering in-person classes and allowing student residence in dormitories and on-campus housing, endangering thousands of students, their families and the broader community.

In Southern California, San Diego State University (SDSU) has recently made national headlines for its outstandingly negligent reopening policies that are resulting in an unmitigated outbreak. At least 513 known positive cases have been confirmed on the campus so far.

A nightmare is unfolding at SDSU, with disturbing reports on social media of infected students given ten minutes to gather belongings before being thrown into isolation dormitories. The infected students are reportedly being housed with strangers and without bedsheets, food or sanitizing equipment.

Students are not being told whether and when they will receive medical care. Desperate students are crying out for help on social media and have even posted “Help Us” signs on room windows. Many Twitter posts reveal that isolation dormitories are already reaching capacity, particularly of first and second year students who may not have any available friends or family to

help them with supplies while they are quarantined.

After just two weeks of reopening, 64 positive cases of COVID-19 were reported at SDSU, and by the following week, the virus had spread exponentially with 513 known cases and one student hospitalization.

Initially, administrators denied the extent of the spread. Officials not only failed to notify students of cases and offer proper resources like mandatory testing, social distancing and mask wearing, but its public data of coronavirus cases had been manipulated to convey a lower case count.

In a now viral Twitter thread, with over 105,000 likes and 27,000 retweets, an SDSU student and Resident Assistant (RA) in an on-campus dormitory exposed the administration’s health policies as negligent and dangerous. The thread reveals that asymptomatic testing is not mandatory, masks are not being provided, and infected students isolating on campus have largely been left to their own devices.

The university also effectively disincentivizes testing by creating a living environment that is so devoid of resources and proper safety measures that it makes students prefer anxious ignorance than to be forced into university-mandated quarantine dormitories.

Students are advised along the CDC guidelines, and they are told to quarantine at home upon exposure and isolate by self-diagnosis. Officially, SDSU is advising students to remain in on-campus housing if they are exposed or contract the virus, but the university states that if their family home is within “driving distance” then they can return home and almost certainly spread the disease even further.

The growing spread in the region is being felt throughout San Diego County. About 15 miles north of

SDSU in La Jolla, California, at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), the administration has released plans to reintroduce 7,500 undergraduate students into dormitories at the end of September. The school has been explicit in its expectation that dozens of students who return to campus may have the virus.

Currently, UCSD plans to test incoming students upon arrival with a second re-test after two weeks with daily self-screening of symptoms. UCSD began a voluntary testing regime in May for graduate students living on campus, which was meant to be the core of the school's reopening initiative. However, only a fraction of students were able to be tested. Even before the year officially starts, the school is already soliciting the public for donations in order to continue its testing plans.

UCSD will offer 12 percent of its regular courses with in-person instruction, and an estimated 14,500 students will be living on campus for the fall quarter. Two weeks ago, with official reopening still a month away, UCSD revealed that over 40 students have already tested positive for COVID-19 since April, along with 21 campus employees and 184 staff and faculty in the health sciences program.

Over 600 UCSD students and faculty have signed an open letter written by students demanding that the administration cease all in-person instruction and the reopening of undergraduate dormitories.

The insistence on reopening despite the disastrous consequences is driven both by the profitability of student housing and the starving of state and federal funding for education. The least expensive housing options at SDSU are over \$11,000 for all grade levels except first year students whose cheapest housing option is over \$17,000 for nine months.

As a result of the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the Democratic Party-dominated California legislature voted to approve a state budget for the 2020–21 fiscal year with over \$54 billion in state spending cuts. This includes cuts to the University of California and California State University systems of \$260 million and \$300 million, respectively.

Opposition is growing throughout the country to the unsafe opening of schools and universities. In August, students and faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Georgia staged “die-in” protests against unsafe reopening plans, and at

least 700 students at the University of Iowa participated in a “sick-out” protest in early September.

Students and faculty at Texas A&M, Pennsylvania State University, Kutztown University, Northwestern University, Boston University and numerous other colleges have written their own open letters and garnered support from hundreds of students.

Beginning on Tuesday, over 1,000 graduate student instructors went on strike at the University of Michigan. The demands include completely online instruction, robust testing and contact tracing, a universal right to work remotely without documentation, rent freezes, emergency funds for students and the demilitarization of the campus.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality commends all students who are taking a stand against the homicidal return-to-school campaign and urges those across the United States and internationally to unite and build rank-and-file safety committees to shut down schools and non-essential business.

Students at SDSU must join forces with students across the US and beyond and turn to the working class to organize a broader fight against the entire policy of the ruling class. A fight to end the pandemic must not be limited to individual campuses or regions, but must be part of a conscious international struggle to end the capitalist system.

Join the IYSSE today!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact