

“It’s immoral and irresponsible to bring students to campus and to conduct in-person classes”

NYU faculty and students denounce unsafe reopening of campus

IYSSE at New York University
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The unsafe reopening of New York University (NYU) amid the still-raging COVID-19 pandemic is encountering growing opposition among faculty and students. The reopening of NYU, the largest private university in the US, is utterly reckless and places the lives of students, workers and residents in the area in immense danger.

Over 10,000 students, faculty and staff have returned to campus to resume in-person classes. Last weekend, the inevitable first outbreak occurred at a student dorm. A freshman student who traveled from Georgia found out that he tested positive while moving into Rubin Residence Hall and after spending time in the hall’s popular communal lounge.

As word spread that a student living in Rubin Hall tested positive, NYU initially did not notify students living in the same building of the positive case. A parent in a NYU Facebook group for parents of current students vented her frustration over the situation. “Anyone know why the kids in Rubin haven’t been notified by the school and mandatory retesting been requested of them? Especially the kids that were hanging out with him?”

By Sunday, the university acknowledged that at least 6 out of the 400 students at Rubin Hall tested positive, and the dorm was placed under mandatory quarantine. However, the quarantine was only put in place for three days, far less than the necessary 14 days. On Tuesday, the administration reported a total of 65 positive COVID-19 cases, up from the 38 cases it had reported the day before in a statistic that had not been updated for four days.

Rebecca Karl, a professor at NYU’s History Department, recently told *Gothamist*, “NYU decided early on it was going to be a death cult, and it was going to engage in this experiment with the community—its students, faculty, staff, security and other worker personnel—that we were all going to be guinea pigs in their financial experiment.”

Seth, an adjunct professor at NYU, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “The number of cases in New York has only managed to stay small after our huge initial spike due to widespread adoption of social distancing, mask wearing, and noncongregation, especially indoors. It’s immoral and irresponsible to bring students to campus and to conduct in-person classes, both of which place them in close proximity to each other.

“It is not enough to establish rules around socially distancing.” He added, “The institution’s willingness to bring students and workers together in physical environments flies directly in the face of those guidelines. If an institution is unwilling to use its voice of authority to set a positive example of how to behave in the middle of a global pandemic, how can we possibly expect anyone involved with that institution to behave appropriately themselves? It is only through continued diligence that we can guarantee the safety of students, education workers, and our society at large. Appropriate diligence does not have space for in-person learning.”

In fact, the university is consciously risking the lives of students, staff and faculty. At the same time, the administration’s communication has focused on preparing to blame all infections on the individual actions of students. Days before the first students were to move into residence halls last month, NYU Board of Trustees Chairman Bill Berkley emailed the university community, stating that the coming weeks “will be challenging” and “there will undoubtedly be bumps,” while calling for “everyone’s commitment and discipline” to “meet the challenge.”

One student, speaking to the student newspaper *NYU Local*, complained that NYU “did not share specific and detailed coronavirus guidelines.”

Another NYU student took to Twitter to express opposition to the administration’s actions, “NYU won’t

give us a specific set of rules on exactly what is allowed because if we follow them and COVID still spreads, it will look like their fault. So they give us the vaguest possible guidelines so that no matter what we do, they can point the finger at us when things go south.” The student continued, saying that this policy “isn’t meant to keep us safe, it’s meant to reduce liability for them. That’s their priority.”

On just the second day of classes, September 3, the administration announced that over 150 violations of NYU’s COVID-19 policy had been issued to students, leading to more than 20 student suspensions by September 5. A letter to the community stated, “These suspensions have overwhelmingly involved large gatherings of NYU students in indoor, off-campus apartments that lacked any form of social distancing or face coverings.” There have also been reports that some students have been suspended for attending gatherings of under 10 people.

On September 5, a party took place off campus in Washington Square Park after dark, attended by hundreds of young people who were not social distancing or wearing face masks. It remains unclear how many at the gathering were NYU students, but in response, Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo—who has been pushing for the in-person reopening of the largest public school system in America—hypocritically condemned the university for not being “New York tough” and sending NYU security to “break it down.”

The criminal policy of the NYU administration is based solely on the profit interests that have guided the response of the ruling class more broadly to the entire pandemic. On the one hand, the NYU Board of Trustees fears that by switching to remote learning they would risk declining enrollment, as there would be little reason for students to pay the exorbitant cost of tuition without any of the traditional aspects of the college experience. Furthermore, as with the reopening of K-12 schools, reopening colleges in the home of Wall Street and the center of world capitalism is meant to set a precedent and ensure that schools and businesses reopen across the country to return to business as usual and maintain the steady flow of profits.

The homicidal policy of reopening schools has already led to new surges and hot spots of COVID-19 cases across the country—a large portion of them in college towns—as the death toll in the US alone approaches 200,000.

A powerful movement of educators, workers and youth is developing against the back-to-work and back-to-school campaigns in the US and internationally. Autoworkers have begun to form rank-and-file safety committees to oppose the unsafe reopening of their factories. At the University of Michigan, a courageous strike by graduate student workers—which is being conducted in opposition to the

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) union—is in its second week and has won broad support among undergraduate students, faculty, staff, and other sections of the working class.

In New York City, the country’s largest school district, educators, parents and students have formed the New York City Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, independent of the Democratic and Republican parties and the Democrat-aligned United Federation of Teachers (UFT), to stop the dangerous school reopenings and fight for the building of a nationwide general strike led by the working class to save lives. Similar committees have been formed in Texas, Florida and Detroit, and by students in Germany.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth organization of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), is spearheading this fight on the campuses. We are calling for the immediate end of all in-person-classes at NYU and other colleges. In order to fight for their lives and social interests, students must turn to the working class. The fight against the reopening of schools and colleges can only be successful if it is based on a socialist strategy that connects the struggles of the working class in the US with those of workers internationally.

We call upon all students, academic workers and staff at NYU and other colleges and schools who want to discuss these questions with us to join our online meeting today, “Oppose the unsafe reopening of schools and colleges: A socialist response to the pandemic,” and to contact us to join our club at NYU or build other clubs at your colleges and schools.

Please register here to attend the event by the IYSSE at NYU today, Wednesday, September 16, at 6.30PM EST, and share it with your friends and colleagues on social media.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact