

Four Texas universities report over 1,000 COVID-19 cases each

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Universities and schools around Texas made absurd claims leading up to the start of the fall semester boasting that they could reopen safely, citing various plans for testing, contact tracing, and requirements for students including social distancing and the use of masks. These claims have been proven false by reality. University towns have, unsurprisingly though tragically, become COVID-19 hotspots.

According to an analysis by the *Texas Tribune*, in the counties where four-year college students make up at least 10 percent of the population, including Lubbock, Hays and Brazos, cases have grown 34 percent since August 19 compared with a 23 percent case increase in counties with proportionally less four-year college students such as Houston and Dallas that also have universities.

A surge in COVID-19 cases in Lubbock and Brazos counties coincided with the start of fall semester at Texas Tech University and Texas A&M University which are located in those respective counties.

Travis County, which includes the city of Austin, also saw the largest increase in cases within the past four weeks in ZIP codes containing the University of Texas at Austin.

Stephen Kissler, an infectious disease researcher at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, recently told the *Hill* that colleges are “places where we’re starting to see a lot of spread” and that the virus has the potential to jump to the general population from college campuses, stating, “diseases don’t stay isolated in the populations where they start.”

Four universities in Texas now total over a thousand confirmed cases each, with a fifth university just under one thousand. The case totals, taken from their respective university coronavirus dashboards, are made even worse once the lack of adequate testing is

considered. This means that the real numbers are likely far higher.

University of Texas at Austin has recorded 1,173 cases, with 974 students and 199 staff cases; Texas A&M has 1,447 cases with a 10.3 percent test positivity rate; 1,553 cases have been identified at Texas Tech; Texas Christian University has confirmed 1,129 cases; and Baylor has 967 cases.

These are all universities that have resumed in-person classes for most students. Universities that have stayed online for most students have recorded fewer cases.

In a crass effort to deflect blame from university administrations and the government for the increase in cases, university leaders across the state have taken to blaming students, citing parties and other risky behaviors.

The *Texas Tribune*, which receives financial contributions from major Texas universities such as the University of Texas System and the Texas A&M System, along with corporate sponsors, claimed that “University leaders say they have little control over *the off-campus parties that are driving spread of the virus*” (emphasis added). That is, the problem is not with the administration, which made the decision to bring tens of thousands of students back to campuses in the middle of a global pandemic, but with the students themselves—and the solution is increasing policing and repression of the student population.

Officials in Lubbock, Texas, also blamed the rise in cases on off-campus activities during a weekly news conference.

These claims are absurd on their face, since students would not be socially concentrated if they were not sent back to campus in the first place. These notions have also been challenged by a recent study by researchers at University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Indiana

University, and the University of Washington and Davidson College which suggests that reopening colleges fueled COVID-19.

Regardless of the growing case counts, debilitating and in some cases long-term effects of the virus, and deaths, university leaders have stayed committed to keeping campuses open.

The chancellor of the Texas A&M University System said earlier this month that the reopening at Texas A&M College Station, which already was close to one thousand cases, had “been reasonably successful in that there’s nothing that’s happened so far that we didn’t expect” and that “We expected an uptick.” That is, that mass infections were expected and a necessary cost of doing business.

This is also the case with the resumption of college football in the state, as was shown with the UT Austin football game which saw more than 15,000 attendees, with only 1,000 of those attending being tested for COVID-19.

The intentional spreading of a deadly virus among the population is a social crime. But when it is the state and big business committing the crime, it is shrugged off as a price of business and the perpetrators will likely receive pay raises and promotions. The reopening of colleges is not only an indictment of the university administrations, but of the government that enforced the policy, and the business leaders and Wall Street financiers who the government serves. That is, the capitalist system as a whole.

There is mass opposition among students, faculty and staff at universities to the policy of herd immunity. Protests have been held at UT Austin and Texas A&M by grad students opposed to in-person classes. Tens of thousands of students voiced their disagreement with the reopening in petitions on Texas A&M system campuses, UT Austin, UT San Antonio, and many other universities. There were countless petitions against in-person classes with tens of thousands of signatures that forced an early end to in-person classes in the spring semester, and again before the start of the fall semester, on many university campuses in Texas. The overwhelming mood on campuses, as can be seen on social media, is one of disgust towards the universities’ actions.

The Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee is fighting to unite the concerns of faculty,

staff, students and parents in K-12 with the struggles of university students and workers across all sectors in order to defeat the back-to-work campaign. Faculty, staff, students and adjuncts who are against the reopening should join the Texas Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. Anyone with information on the situation on their college campuses should contact the WSWS today.



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