

New York University defies state COVID-19 guidelines and continues in-person classes

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On Oct. 9, New York University (NYU) completed its second 14-day period of COVID-19 tracking, reporting 108 new cases of coronavirus at its main campus in lower Manhattan.

In late August, the state of New York established thresholds for temporary suspension of in-person classes at academic institutions. All colleges and universities are required to track COVID-19 cases at each of their campus locations in 14-day periods. Schools that report over 100 cases or the infection of 5 percent of the total on-campus population within the span of two weeks are required to transition to online instruction until the New York State Department of Health determines that it is “safe” to fully reopen.

NYU passed this threshold on Oct. 7, reporting 101 new cases at its main campus. Despite this indication of a steadily growing outbreak of COVID-19 in the university community, NYU is continuing to hold in-person classes.

On Oct. 6, NYU spokesperson John Beckman announced in an email to the NYU community that the state will allow the university to “*continue to carry on as we have been.*” Beckman cited NYU’s “low positivity rate” and “robust program of testing” as reasons for why the state government is not requiring the university to shut its doors. He stressed, “Schools, units, and individual faculty members should not independently make changes in instruction or other operations.” In other words, all members of the university community are forbidden from canceling classes for their own protection.

Academic institutions across New York that have thus far passed the state threshold have been forced to shut their doors. Over the last month, three State University of New York (SUNY) campuses ended in-person instruction after hundreds of students, faculty

and staff tested positive for the virus on each campus in the span of two weeks. On Oct. 5, the SUNY campus at Cortland paused in-person classes after reporting 101 new cases in roughly one week.

The decision to not immediately halt in-person classes and work at NYU in light of this grim milestone underscores the recklessness of the university administration. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the hundreds of millions of dollars that the university has continued to rake in as a result of holding in-person classes.

Against the advice of medical experts around the world, over 20,000 students, faculty, and staff were forced back into classrooms, offices and other workplaces at NYU on Sept. 2, endangering hundreds of thousands of lives in New York City. As was expected, the university’s “robust program of testing” has proven to be completely inadequate. Over 260 members of the NYU community have already contracted the virus and that number is steadily rising each day.

The driving force behind every decision made by the university has not been the desire to ensure that academic life continues to be as “rich” and “vibrant” as ever before, but to protect the interests of NYU’s millionaire administrators and the collection of multi-millionaires and billionaires that make up its board of trustees.

For decades, NYU has embodied the broader subordination of academia to private profit. The university has cultivated extensive ties with American imperialism, subordinated student hunger and mental health to private profit and repeatedly demonstrated contempt for the most basic democratic rights.

In New York City more broadly, the response of Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo and Democratic

Mayor Bill de Blasio to the pandemic has likewise been dictated by the interests of Wall Street. Both politicians are responsible for the devastating delay in shutting down schools and businesses in mid-March, the brutal suppression of mass protests against police brutality, and the disastrous reopening of schools and businesses that is causing a second wave of the virus in the city.

As the number of COVID-19 cases in New York City grows, the risk of an explosion of coronavirus cases at NYU is increasing by the day.

This policy of reopening, despite a steady rise in cases in over 30 states, is taking place throughout the country and internationally. Workers are being forced back to work and their children are being herded back into schools to ensure that nothing impedes the production of profits. This policy has resulted in a death toll surpassing 1 million and almost 40 million infections worldwide.

Workers around the world are beginning to fight back, carrying out wildcat strikes and organizing independent rank-and-file safety committees in workplaces and communities.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at NYU urges undergraduate students, faculty and staff to unite with struggling graduate student workers to form independent rank-and-file committees and develop a broad struggle on the basis of the following demands:

- An end to all in-person classes! There can be no “safe reopening” under conditions of a raging pandemic. In a tragic proof of this fact, just a few days ago, Chad Dorrill, a 19-year-old student at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, died from neurological complications resulting from COVID-19, after taking classes under a hybrid model similar to the one being used at NYU.

- The university must meet all needs for technology by students and workers alike to enable remote learning. No student or worker can be allowed to suffer in their educational work from lack of technological equipment.

- Free tuition for all! Graduate student workers must receive a living wage and stipend. Education is a social

right, not a privilege.

- Child care and health care for all university students and workers, including graduate workers, must be fully covered by the university. This includes additional needs and expenses from remote teaching and learning and COVID-19 infections.

- Protect international students and immigrants! No to deportations and visa cancellations! Every worker and youth has the right to live, study and work wherever they choose, with full rights of citizenship.

Students, faculty and staff at all academic institutions who seek to undertake a serious fight against mass death and suffering must turn to the broader struggle of the working class for its social and democratic rights. This fight cannot be won by appealing to the university administration or the political representatives of the ruling class. Only the independent mobilization of workers and youth behind a clear socialist program and perspective against the entire capitalist system can save the lives of millions of human beings. We urge all those who wish to take up this struggle to join the IYSSE today.



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