

Eighteen-year-old University of Dayton freshman, Michael Lang, dies of COVID-19

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Michael Lang, a freshman at the University of Dayton in Ohio, died last Thursday after weeks of battling the COVID-19 virus. He was just 18 years old.

By all accounts Michael was a perfectly healthy, happy young person in great physical shape, with no underlying conditions.

Michael arrived on campus in early August before classes at the university were set to begin. His mother, Katy Lang, told ABC Chicago that she had reservations about sending her son to college amid the pandemic but that she knew that “he was anxious to start a new chapter in his life.”

“I think he just was so excited, typical 18-year-old, to get away from home,” Katy Lang told the local news station.

Lang started having symptoms of COVID-19 by Labor Day. He reportedly told his parents that he had lost his sense of taste and smell, a common symptom of the virus.

He returned home to quarantine in La Grange, Illinois on September 13, a week after presenting with symptoms. This timeline of events suggests that Michael caught the virus while on campus. However, the school administration continues to insist that it is “unclear” where he was when he became infected.

Since reopening, the university has reported more than 1,400 new COVID-19 cases. New daily cases peaked at 167 on August 28. Despite a sharp rise in cases on the campus, throughout the state, region and indeed, the country, the school pushed forward with their plans to return to in-person classes.

In the wake of Lang’s death, the school has not announced any changes to how it operates or any additional safety measures. Remarkably, the university has since loosened existing restrictions even more, allowing students to return to dining halls and other indoor activities, according to reports from students enrolled at the university who spoke to the WSWS under condition of anonymity.

When Michael returned home, he received an initial COVID-19 test, which came back negative. It was not until after he suffered cardiac arrest toward the end of September that a second test showed that he did, in fact, have the virus.

“He had no pre-existing conditions. He had never even been to the hospital. He had his yearly physical, sports physicals,” his mother told ABC Chicago. “He was a really healthy, young kid.”

Michael was rushed to the hospital during his cardiac arrest episode. He remained hospitalized until his death on Thursday.

One shudders to think of the depth of grief felt by Michael’s parents who are guilty of nothing other than wanting their child to enjoy the milestones and experiences associated with leaving home to attend college.

Michael’s death has had a deep impact throughout the community, and well beyond. Thousands of comments of condolences have flooded the internet since news of his death on Thursday.

On Twitter one user responded to a tweet from the account @FacesOfCovid: “His smile - you can see that he brightened the lives of those around him. Rest In Peace. I’m so sorry for your loss. I have a 17 year old and a 19 year old - I can’t imagine, and it’s not fair.”

Another user wrote: “I’ve also got a 17 and 19 years old and can’t imagine how angry I would be if my government ‘gave up’ fighting covid-19.” Recalling a quote from recent comments made by President Donald Trump the user added: “We are not going to control the Pandemic.”

The original post has been shared over 2,000 times and like by over 6,000 people.

In Michael’s obituary, posted online, one can find dozens of messages from friends and strangers alike:

One reads:

I unfortunately did not get the chance to know Michael and I cannot fathom what your family is going through right now. I am so very sorry for your loss. As a UD professor and COVID-19 long-hauler, it breaks my heart that you lost someone so precious to you. It’s hard to wrap my head around why I, someone twice your son’s age, is still here. I know

this in no way diminishes your pain, but I do want you to know that he will always remain in my thoughts as I study the effects of COVID-19 on young adults. Your family remains deep in my thoughts.

And another:

Dear Lang Family- I do not know you, but my heart breaks for you and the loss of your dear, vibrant son Michael. His life was full, but much too short. As a fellow parent of a college freshman, I am heartbroken for you. I will keep you and your family in my prayers and hope that Michael's legacy will be his great love of life and all those whom he loved.

The outpouring of support from friends, fellow students and even complete strangers to this tragic death is a powerful testament of the immense sensitivity and compassion felt by broad masses of the population to all those suffering from the consequences of the pandemic.

While Michael's death is particularly tragic given his age, it is far from unique.

As of today, over 232,000 people in the US have succumbed to the virus, and 1,170,000 have died internationally. The United States is home to more than a fifth of the deaths globally despite representing only 4.5 percent of the world's population.

The US death count includes countless young, healthy and bright students like 19-year-old Chad Dorrill from North Carolina, 20-year-old Jamain Stevens Jr. of Pennsylvania, and Jezreel Lowie B. Juan of Hawaii—to name only a few.

These deaths, like that of Michael Lang, were entirely preventable.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the main concern of the US ruling elite, Democrat and Republican alike, has not been the health and wellbeing of workers and youth, but the financial health and wellbeing of Wall Street, the corporations, and the bank accounts of the rich.

In line with these priorities, both parties have de facto adopted the policy of “herd immunity”—that is, allowing the virus to spread rapidly and broadly among young people, their families and coworkers, and from them to the whole population, come what may. This policy has prompted the relentless drive to downplay the seriousness of the virus, and to reopen schools and universities.

Youth and workers have suffered immense emotional, psychological and physical consequences from this policy,

while others, like Michael, have been put into early graves.

Workers on the front lines and students who have gone back to in-person learning report feeling constant dread and anxiety. They fear for their own safety and livelihoods, but also that they could be unknowingly spreading the virus to their loved ones.

Despite the hemming and hawing of both political parties, virtually nothing has been done to protect the population. Testing remains at abysmally low levels. When tests are readily available, they are—like Michael's first test—often unreliable. Contact tracing is almost non-existent. Unemployment aid has been cut off for millions. Social services are being robbed of resources. And despite all scientific evidence that indicates that in-person learning will lead to more infection, more hospitalizations and more deaths—the drive to reopen schools continues.

This reality is the product of policies driven by capitalism, a socioeconomic system which prioritizes profit over life. The lives of workers and youth are seen as expendable and their deaths, part of the cost of doing business.

Under such a system, the implementation of rational policies—the shutdown of nonessential production, quarantining, mass testing and contact tracing, the systematic coordination of economic, scientific, industrial and information resources—are cast aside because they run up against the profit interests of the ruling elite.

A rational approach to the pandemic to save lives will not be achieved by electing one or another bourgeois politician, whether it is Republican Donald Trump or Democrat Joe Biden for president.

What is required is the political intervention of the working class with a genuine socialist program and perspective representing their own class interests.

The Socialist Equality Party and its student and youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, urge students, teachers, college faculty, parents and all other workers who agree with our perspective to get involved in our struggle today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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