Binghamton University closes after coronavirus outbreak, University at Buffalo defies guidelines to remain open

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The State University of New York (SUNY) system saw two colleges—Binghamton University and the University at Buffalo—reach 100 new COVID-19 cases this week. One hundred cases within a two-week period is the state threshold for a temporary 14-day pause on in-person learning.

This marks the second time in the fall semester that Binghamton has been forced to close due to an outbreak of COVID-19. The university closed on October 8 after 89 students became infected within a two-week period and it became apparent that 100 cases would be reached in a matter of days.

The fact that Binghamton has had two major outbreaks this semester is an indictment of the bipartisan campaign to reopen schools and colleges, and a warning of the general upsurge in cases around the country. Binghamton University has closed its campus until the Thanksgiving holiday, when all SUNY students will return home for the rest of the semester. The University at Buffalo, however, has decided to remain open until November 24.

On Tuesday, Binghamton President Harvey Stenger announced that the campus would be halting in-person instruction beginning Wednesday. He stated that core campus facilities would remain open and that staff should continue with their normal work. In-person academic exams that had been scheduled for next week will now be held online.

With the suspension of in-person learning, Binghamton will move into the post Thanksgiving remote learning period early. All SUNY schools have agreed to move to full remote after the holiday in order to avoid transmission to and from the campus.

Per state guidelines, all students will be required to receive a negative test before they can leave for home. Stenger encouraged all students to remain on campus or in their off-campus housing until the scheduled break and to report for their scheduled coronavirus test.

Syracuse University and the University at Albany were forced to close down last week after large outbreaks, and the private colleges of Niagara University and Hilbert College also closed after small outbreaks occurred.

SUNY Cortland has been at full-remote since the beginning of October after a major outbreak has recorded 97 cases since November 7. The college now totals 732 confirmed cases, seven away from surpassing SUNY Oneonta, which has 738. SUNY schools as a whole have recorded 1,225 cases since November 7, a full quarter of all recorded cases for the fall semester totaling 5,010.

While the University at Buffalo, SUNY's "flagship" university, has reached 100 cases during this two-week period and should be required to shut down, the university, in coordination with the SUNY system and county and state health officials, has decided to remain open until the planned holiday closure of November 24.

The administration claims that this is necessary to ensure that all students are tested before returning home. No explanation has been provided as to why Buffalo will remain open while Binghamton, a school of comparable size, closes.

Students and local residents expressed their dissatisfaction with the decision to remain open. One student, writing in the comment section of an article by the *Buffalo News* published on November 17, wrote:

"This is insane from UB [University of Buffalo]. Even though they can transition to online mode in time

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they continue to hold classes in-person putting lives at risk. I have an in-person exam on Thursday and I am scared to attend it as there will be lots of students. If final exams are going to be held in online mode, why cant [sic] we do the same for remaining classes and exams."

Another commenter wrote, "UB is insane anyway you look at it!. .. If UB really cared about their students they would allow them to go home, with their family. [S]top looking at them as money in your establishments [sic] pocket."

In a Twitter post directed at the university, one person wrote, "why even bother pretending to care at this point? It's blatantly obvious that well-defined endpoints for preserving student and faculty health mean nothing to you."

The decision by the university, SUNY and the county and state health departments to allow in-person classes to continue is reckless and irresponsible. Between November 9 and November 17, the campus tested 11,500 faculty, staff and students, but still had up to 4,500 tests to complete.

The concern that students may leave before testing can be completed is valid, but it is no reason to further endanger students, especially when students can hardly be stopped from returning home even if classes remain in person.

It is apparent that SUNY, the University at Buffalo, and the state and local governments—both of which are controlled by the Democratic Party—are implementing the policy of herd immunity. What is of concern to them is that academic operations remain open as long as possible in order to justify the reopening of the economy amid a rapid resurgence in the pandemic.

The other SUNY colleges plan to move to remote instruction after the Thanksgiving break. However, their spring semester plans make no such concession, and show SUNY's intent to return campuses to in-person instruction regardless of the science and the state of the pandemic. Projections from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predict another 150,000 people could die by February 1, the planned date for the return to in-person instruction. Revised CDC guidelines indicate schools can be vectors of transmission.

Students, educators, staff and community members are having their health and safety put in jeopardy by the deadly campaign to keep schools and workplaces open. The fight to protect the working class from the pandemic cannot be entrusted to the same political forces demanding that they risk their lives.

All who want to fight for the protection of workers and students should join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to wage an independent fight today.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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