

Campus police deployed to UC Berkeley dormitories as administration blames COVID-19 outbreak on students

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Campus police officers have been deployed to patrol the student dormitories at the University of California, Berkeley as a severe outbreak of COVID-19 that has spiked since the beginning of the year impacts students, faculty and staff.

In an email to students living in dormitories, campus administrators warned that students faced suspension from the University for not complying with campus directives regarding COVID-19. The email then added, “We don’t wish for residents to be alarmed by this increased UCPD (University of California Police Department) presence, but we must ensure the health of our community.”

The campus housing page clarifies that UCPD and a third-party security force have been deployed to enforce a self-sequester mandate that bans all UC dormitory students, regardless of whether they have tested positive, from leaving their rooms except “to obtain medical care, including mental health care, in case of emergency, to comply with your testing requirements, to use the bathroom, or to obtain food from nearby outdoor Cal Dining kiosk.”

Over the last two weeks, there has been a surge of new cases at UC Berkeley. While cases were below 50 a week in the fall, they now exceed 150 per week.

By mobilizing the police and threatening students with expulsion for violating protocols, the campus is doing everything it can to avoid and obscure the fact that university administrators are responsible for the spread of the virus, not the students.

While most college classes are being held online, the school has encouraged students to return to the dormitories, which serve as a lucrative source of cash for the university. UC Berkeley’s budget has been

significantly impacted by cuts over the last ten years, and the school is currently facing a \$340 million budget deficit.

UC Berkeley is desperate to keep students in its business-minded dormitory and dining programs, while it pretends that the mass communal living units could ever be remotely safe from the virus during the pandemic.

In addition to threatening students with expulsion and deploying police, UC Berkeley has also implemented quarantines for non-sick students that have forced them to live alongside the ill.

Students who live on the same floor as another student who tested positive, even if they themselves tested negative, were sent over the last few weeks to one campus dormitory, with everyone who has or might have COVID-19, to quarantine. Students were given warning by the university and told to pack their bags and await shuttle pickup.

One Redditor posting on the UC Berkeley forum described this ordeal. He and his floor mates were now sequestered, unable to go outside, in the COVID-19 quarantine dorm for 14 days, even though none of them tested positive, but a floor mate did. He noted that while an individual may contract COVID-19, “the larger weight of the punishment is given to the rest of the floor.”

Further campus mandates ban students who are staying in UC housing from all solitary outdoor exercise and recommends that employed students “not attend [work] during this self-sequester time.” The campus states that “Berkeley city ordinance allows the civil enforcement of local health officer orders. Individuals can be cited up to \$100 a day for a first-

time violation, with penalties up to \$500 per day for repeat offenses.”

Those who test positive for COVID-19 need to quarantine, and scientifically guided measures must be taken to stop the spread of the virus. But the problem is not the students; it is the reckless decision of university administrators to encourage broad layers of the student population to return to campus housing in the middle of a deadly pandemic in the first place.

Just this last week, UC Berkeley began the next phase of its reopening, allowing some smaller classes to return to in-person meetings. University leaders are anxious to reopen in the fall in the face of the budget deficit.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at UC Berkeley opposes campus policies imposing police in dormitories and threatening students with expulsion. There should be no in-campus instruction of any kind until everyone is vaccinated and the pandemic is brought under control.

Student dormitories should be shut down except for those students who need the housing because they have nowhere else to go. Those students, and all students, should not have to pay fees and should receive as much assistance as they need.

The San Francisco Bay Area is the wealthiest region in the wealthiest state in the wealthiest country in the world. Billions of dollars could be made easily available by taking small fractions of the wealth accumulated by billionaires in the region. This money could then be used to ensure a proper shutdown of the economy, where all workers and students receive full compensation and assistance, without risking their lives or those around them.

The mass outbreak of COVID-19 at UC Berkeley underscores the inherently unsafe, irrational and, ultimately, murderous policy of keeping schools open during the pandemic. Just yesterday, the Chicago Teachers Union finalized its deal to send teachers and students back to in-person learning at the behest of the school district, in order to get parents back to their workplaces.

This policy is part of the broader policy of the Biden Administration to reopen schools despite all scientific evidence pointing to school shutdowns being one of the most important ways of halting the spread of the virus. With the development and distribution of effective

vaccines, the drive to reopen schools and businesses before the pandemic is under control is nothing but a crime, aimed at securing and protecting the profits of the capitalists who own the economy.



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