

Oppose the unsafe reopening of University of Michigan!

International Youth and Students for Social Equality at University of Michigan
2 September 2021

Attend the next University of Michigan IYSSE meeting online on Thursday, September 9, at 7:30. Register today for more information.

Classes for the new academic year started Monday at all three University of Michigan campuses. Students returned for in-person learning under conditions of a surge of the COVID-19 pandemic driven by the far more infectious Delta variant. Across the country, universities and colleges are beginning to see outbreaks of the virus even at schools with high vaccination rates among students.

At Duke University, where 98 percent of students and 92 percent of faculty are vaccinated, 349 students and 15 faculty and staff tested positive just in the past week. Duke University was forced to halt indoor dining and start mandating masks in outdoor areas as well. Similarly, at University of California Berkeley, test positivity went up from 0.5 percent last week to 5.8 percent this Tuesday. At Berkeley, 97 percent of undergrads and 96.9 percent of graduate students are fully vaccinated.

Both of these cases prove, once again, that under conditions of the rapid spread of the new variant, there is no safe way to open schools. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has stressed since the beginning of the pandemic, vaccinations alone are not enough to stop the virus.

Students, faculty, staff and the community more broadly must be warned: the question of an outbreak at U-M is not a matter of *if* but *when*. University of Michigan has a slightly lower vaccination rate among students compared to Duke or UC Berkeley, with 92 percent of students reporting vaccination at the time of this writing, according to the university's official COVID tracking dashboard. Among faculty and staff, the vaccination rate is 90 percent and 76 percent, respectively.

Early signs of a community outbreak have already emerged. Almost every undergraduate and graduate residential hall at University of Michigan has positive cases. Students, faculty and staff are already beginning to

receive notifications of confirmed COVID-19 cases in classes. On the third day of class, students reported receiving "COVID Classroom Notification" email alerts, notifying them that another student in one of their classes tested positive.

Remarkably, the emails fail to provide any information about which class the infected student is enrolled in. Moreover, the university explicitly instructed the notified students who are fully vaccinated and asymptomatic that "there is no requirement to obtain a COVID test or be quarantined." Likewise, when faculty and staff members are alerted that someone in their workplace building has tested positive, no further details are provided.

Images of crowded bus stops and nose-to-nose packed campus buses began to make their way on social media on Monday. A few instructors posted images of tiny classrooms that are far too small to allow for social distancing. There have also been photos and videos of large, tightly-packed throngs of students spilling out onto the streets during the wave of house parties thrown last weekend immediately following student move-ins.

There is no doubt that a large section of students on campus do not understand the dangers of the Delta variant, but by no fault of their own. The university administration and the entire political establishment has deliberately downplayed the threat in order to reopen schools and workplaces.

The university administration, mirroring the "strategy" of the Biden administration, has been carrying out a constant campaign to assure the public that "things are going back to normal." It has lifted capacity limits on classes, indoor gatherings and sports events. In fact, in the past three days, the university went ahead with its annual club fair where thousands of students gathered, at least three-quarters unmasked.

Despite mask mandates, students are allowed, and to a certain degree encouraged, to not wear masks anywhere in

their residential buildings, including common areas.

Protocols for potential outbreaks are kept very vague, and the metric used to reevaluate the university's COVID response is designed to be manipulated to avoid further restrictions. One of the criteria requires a positivity rate of 3 percent for tests among asymptomatic individuals, but these tests are conducted solely on a voluntary basis. Even when a criterion in the metric is met, the university makes no promise to move all classes online and will only convene a committee to discuss future steps.

A mass outbreak and public health disaster is inevitable unless necessary measures are taken to stop community spread.

Science shows that mask and vaccine mandates, which are essentially the only significant measures taken by the university, are necessary but not sufficient for controlling the spread of the virus in communities. Due to increased transmissibility of the Delta variant, the virus is still able to transmit in communities even with a high vaccination rate. As the virus mutates into potentially more infectious variants and as the effects of vaccines wane over time, the ability to prevent outbreaks through vaccination alone becomes even more difficult.

In contradiction with the university's reputation as a leading institution in scientific research, the university is promoting a rose-tinted outlook based not on science and social needs but the interests of profit. There is, of course, an enormous amount of revenue to be generated by reopening campus housing, dining halls, and spectator sports.

The U-M Board of Regents is made up of powerful individuals representing Wall Street, the Pentagon, financial, real estate and health insurance interests. Six of the eight members of the Board of Regents are also members of the Democratic Party, which has taken up the baton of downplaying the pandemic passed on from the Trump administration.

Opposition is beginning to emerge among parents, students and workers throughout the country against the homicidal policy of school reopenings, both at colleges and K-12 schools. At the University of Michigan, thousands have signed an online petition calling for the university to take the danger of the Delta variant more seriously and implement stronger measures on the campus.

The fight for an end to in-person learning at U-M cannot be contained to the campus alone. Any significant opposition will inevitably come into conflict with the entire political establishment which sees mass infections

and deaths as a necessary "cost" to defend the interests of the corporate and financial aristocracy.

Last fall, graduate students at U-M waged a courageous strike against the unsafe resumption of in-person classes. The two-week strike was isolated and strangled by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the parent union of the Graduate Employees' Organization and an appendage of the Democratic Party. Soon after the strike ended, the campus saw major outbreaks of COVID-19, which forced the university to move entirely to remote classes.

For the current opposition to advance, a warning must be made: no confidence can be placed in the Democratic Party, the party of Wall Street, the military and the intelligence agencies, or any of the various organizations or trade unions that do its bidding.

The struggle on the campus must be expanded into the working class, which is the only social force capable of fighting to end the pandemic. Students must turn to teachers, bus drivers, health care workers and autoworkers, who are confronted with the same dangerous conditions.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth movement of the Socialist Equality Party, is the only organization fighting for a policy to eliminate and eradicate the pandemic. We are fighting to link students up with workers for a common struggle against the dangerous reopening of schools and workplaces. Take up the fight against the pandemic and join the IYSSE!



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