

“We have to stand together to push back”

NYU student speaks out on the dangers of in-person classes amidst COVID-19 resurgence

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The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at New York University (NYU) is holding an online public meeting this Saturday, September 18. The meeting will inform students and educators about the science of the pandemic and discuss a political strategy to fight against the reopening of NYU and public schools and colleges across the city. Register here to attend.

New York University, with 27,000 undergraduate students and 25,000 graduate students, opened for classes last week. On Monday, they were joined for in-person classes by million K-12 students who attend school in New York City. Public transit and streets are again bustling with millions of people, despite the pandemic continuing to rage.

As the Delta variant rips across the US, almost every county in the country (93 percent) is designated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as high-risk for community transmission of COVID-19. Increasing numbers of universities and school districts are being severely affected, with tens of thousands of students exposed, thousands in hospitals, and dozens succumbing to the virus, including one student at Texas A&M University confirmed in the last two days.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) are waging an international campaign to provide the scientific information and organizational means to the working class to put an end to the pandemic, using a full eradication strategy. Students, parents and educators must rally around the demand for fully remote learning, adequate technology and compensation as part of the demand for a halt to non-essential activity in order to stop the pandemic and eradicate COVID-19.

The IYSSE at NYU recently spoke with an NYU senior

undergraduate student who was looking to speak out on and oppose the unsafe conditions students are facing in classrooms. We changed the student's name to Alex to maintain their anonymity.

Alex had to move from Texas to New York to attend in-person classes, since NYU does not provide a remote option. He said that he had contracted COVID-19 last month. “Even though I have been fully vaccinated for months, I contracted COVID, a breakthrough case unfortunately. I've been grateful that I survived with my life, but at the same time I'm still having Long COVID symptoms. I cannot smell anything and my memory has gotten worse. I'm very wary of putting myself in another situation where I could contract COVID again.”

Alex described the recent conditions he faced in NYU classrooms.

“I had my first classes last week and they were just terrible. Entering NYU buildings is a health hazard. There's no staggered entry or exit.”

“The first class that I had was in a small lecture room, really like a classroom size, and there was no space in between students. I had to ask the professor if she would create space between each chair. I had to help her bring another table to the table that we already had and move the chairs out of the way so that there was some sort of space in between students. It still was not even three feet between the students, but it was better than shoulder to shoulder.”

“In my math class, in an auditorium that fits 50-60 people, there were 50-60 people in there. There were only four empty spaces in the entire auditorium. Everywhere else it was packed with students, shoulder to shoulder. I sat down and felt someone cough on my neck.”

“I personally could not handle it. I started to have a panic attack and had to leave because it reminded me of

my experience contracting COVID. All I could think of was the loved ones I had lost to COVID and how the NYU administration is just so unconcerned about student health and more concerned about profit.” Alex said he has lost multiple family members from COVID-19, including his grandfather.

The “safety measures” implemented by the university were “woefully inadequate,” Alex said.

“They claim that there is masking and tell everyone that they have to have their mask on, but they completely disregard social distancing. On top of that, the university’s online COVID ‘Daily Screener’ test is little more than a joke. You don’t even have to answer questions, all you have to do is put in your student login information and it automatically approves you to enter NYU buildings for the day... it might as well not even exist.”

In terms of the general sentiments of the student body towards reopening, Alex said, “I don’t think there’s been one student that I’ve spoken to who has been in favor of in-person classes.”

At the start of the semester last week, NYU President Alexander Hamilton sent an email to the NYU community centered around the motto, “Keep each other safe.” Asked how it is possible to “keep each other safe” under conditions of a full reopening at NYU, Alex responded, “You know, to me, it’s like the owner of a slaughterhouse telling the cows, “Oh, stick together,” as they are pushed through the slaughterhouse.”

“It is just completely asinine and completely disrespectful and disingenuous for upper management to act as if NYU is not actively putting students in harm’s way. They are giving us no option, and are not even flexible on allowing students to go virtual. Every professor I’ve spoken to has said, ‘In-person is mandatory.’ In some classes, quizzes and tests have been switched to “paper only.” So, if you are not in class, you are out of luck. If you are not in person, you are not able to take the quizzes and tests that are a huge part of your grade.”

Alex feels that NYU is preparing to blame students for outbreaks, rather than preventing outbreaks.

“They are completely disregarding asymptomatic COVID transmission. People could, unknowingly, be spreading the virus, but there is no mandatory testing to expose this. Even the little testing that they do is only a small percentage of the total student population. This failure rests on the university’s shoulders, but also the government. The fact that universities are even allowed to

open up fully in-person is a policy failure.”

Alex is strongly in favor of taking action against the unsafe reopening at NYU: “If we do not take action ourselves as the collective [of] students, no one will. The university does not have our interests at heart, other than how much money we are bringing in, how much we are filling their coffers.”

He continued, stating that NYU “benefit[s] tremendously with the introduction of students into the dorms... The main motivation [for in-person reopening] is clearly financial. It is clear that they are making hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars off of students this semester.”

Alex also commented on the broader drive to fully reopen colleges and schools across the US. At the University of Michigan, where a friend of his is enrolled, Alex said that “on the Ann Arbor campus, cases doubled from 73 to over 174 in just a week from August 22 to the 29th. These schools all do not have students’ health in mind when it comes to COVID.”

“It’s terrible. In Washington D.C. alone, nearly 1,000 public school students and teachers are quarantined currently. The schools have only been open for a week of in-person classes. So, things are going to get worse if this continues. Teachers are going to die, students are going to die because of public policy, a lack of leadership, and just our government in general.”

“I hope that students, parents, and teachers can join together and really put a stop to it. The numbers are bad and they are not going to improve without immediate action being taken.”

“It is clear that the reason for the push for opening up all in-person is for purely economic interests. The ruling class is really trying to push people back into an in-person world. They are looking at it from a purely financial standpoint, which is ‘regardless of how many people die, we need to make sure that our investments are being put to good use.’ We have to stand together to push back.”



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