

University of Michigan maintains in-person classes despite shooting threat

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Students at the University of Michigan raised urgent concerns over a threat posted on September 24 on the anonymous confession site SinnList, where an individual threatened to commit a mass shooting targeting women on the U of M campus.

“On October 4th, I’m going to the University of Michigan and blow away every single woman I see with an AR-15,” the post read.

Despite the threat and calls from members of the campus to move classes and activities online for the day, the university maintained an in-person schedule on October 4 (Monday). The cavalier response of the University to the threat of a mass shooting reflects the broader indifference of the ruling class to the lives and safety of the population.

The anonymous post expressed far-right views and approvingly referred to Elliot Rodgers, the shooter responsible for the 2014 Isla Vista terror attack, where Rodgers killed six University of California Santa Barbara students and injured 14 others. The poster referred to women as “f***ing animals” and professed a commitment to a “violent pro-male revolution,” ideas in line with the so-called “incel movement.”

The term “incel,” or “involuntary celibate,” is associated with a far-right online subculture made up of mostly young men who promote misogynist and white supremacist views. Rodgers and several other mass murderers of the last two decades, including Stoneman Douglas High School shooter Nikolas Cruz, have been considered adherents of incel ideology.

In light of the shooting threat, a petition started by three graduate students demanding that in-person classes and activities on Monday be cancelled or moved online quickly received more than 2,300 signatures. The petition stated: “The University administration... has not announced any intention to halt in-person classes on Monday, which would force tens of thousands of students and workers to enter a potentially deadly environment with a heightened police presence.

“We, the undersigned students, alum, faculty, and staff

across all three University of Michigan campuses are outraged by the University’s callous and undemocratic decision to host in-person classes on Monday, October 4th.”

It continues, “We are frustrated by [Division of Public Safety and Security’s] statement, which ignores how the anonymous poster’s rhetoric could embolden other white supremacist misogynists to attack women, non-binary people, and other oppressed community members on Monday and beyond.”

In addition to calling for moving Monday classes and activities online, the petition raised several demands, including that the University issue a written statement “stipulating no students, staff, or faculty will face academic or professional penalties for missing an in-person class or shift on Monday.” It also called for the university to “release a public statement outlining the administration’s plans to combat similar threats of gendered terror on campus without expanding campus police forces or deepening law enforcement’s ties to the University.”

The petition was sent to University President Mark Schlissel on October 3 at 6:12 pm. At 6:32 pm, a mass email from President Schlissel announced that in-person classes would take place “as scheduled” and reiterated the university’s declaration that an investigation by U-M’s Division of Public Safety and Security and the FBI found no threat to the campus.

No other information, including any information regarding the identity of the individual who made the online threat, has been released.

Understandably, many students and members of the campus continued to feel uneasy trepidation. One student tweeted Monday morning, “remember when the police went to elliot rodger’s house, decided there was no threat, and did nothing, 3 weeks before he killed 6 people and injured 14 in the name of misogyny? we have a right to be terrified still.”

A majority of the current generation of college students has grown up in the aftermath of the 1999 Columbine High School shooting and have lived through an epidemic of school shootings in the US. The consciousness of this

generation has been profoundly shaped by events such as the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, which saw 32 killed, the 2012 Sandy Hook shooting, which saw 26 killed, and the 2018 Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, which saw 17 killed.

Students, faculty and staff rightfully expressed opposition to the university's decision to hold in-person classes on Monday. The shooting threat also took place amid growing far-right threats and provocations in the area.

On September 19, just a few weeks prior, a Black Lives Matter mural in neighboring Ypsilanti was defaced and tagged by the white supremacist group Patriot Front. A week prior to that, stickers from the Proud Boys marked as "permits" for "Afghan Refugee Hunting" were found on the U-M Ann Arbor campus. Both the Patriot Front and the Proud Boys are organizations comprised of fascist and neo-Nazi thugs who regularly carry out acts of violence. Moreover, the acute danger of the far right is made clear in the fact that Michigan is the state where a plot by fascist militia members to kidnap and murder Governor Gretchen Whitmer was exposed in October of 2020.

The cavalier and reckless response of the university to the shooting threat expresses the profit interests that dominate it. The university is motivated by considerations that, in its view, take precedence over the safety of members of the campus. This was already demonstrated by the university's fall reopening plan, which brought students back to the campus while the deadlier and more transmissible Delta variant of COVID-19 was surging across the country.

At the beginning of the fall semester, an online petition received hundreds of signatures from instructors raising concerns over the reopening plan, citing a growing body of scientific evidence that the university's mitigation policies would not suffice to keep the campus safe.

The approach of the university to both dangers, the pandemic and the shooting threat, mirrors the outlook of the Democratic Party. The Biden administration, following virtually the same course as the previous administration, is focused on serving the needs of the financial aristocracy during the pandemic: Factories and workplaces must be reopened to fuel the incessant drive for profit, and the schools must be reopened to facilitate the return to work of parents. To the ruling class, the enormous loss of life and the massive section of the population that will suffer months or years with "Long COVID" is just the "cost of doing business."

The financial interests that dominate the University of Michigan follow a similar logic. The amount of money generated by reopening campus housing, dining halls and spectator sports outweighs the human cost. For U-M, there is simply too much money to be made to stop regularly

packing over 100,000 mostly unmasked spectators into a football stadium during an ongoing surge of community transmission of the Delta variant across the state.

The university's response to the shooting threat also mirrors the Democratic Party's efforts to downplay the danger of the far-right, exemplified in Biden's appeals since January 6 for "unity" with the Republican Party, whose fascist elements helped organize a violent coup attempt.

Both the epidemic of mass shootings and the pandemic have had a profound impact on this generation's view of capitalist society. There is a growing longing for a different kind of world, one which has stamped out the normalization of mass violence and death, and which sees human and social needs as the basis for organizing society's resources.

To bring an end to capitalism—and its plagues of mass shootings, endless wars, ecological collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic—a working class movement for socialism must be built. This movement will base itself on a scientific understanding of society and its current ills, which will enable it to fight for an international strategy of eradication of COVID-19.

This movement will fight for political power and the transformation of society from one driven by private profit and the nationalist interests of competing nation-states to a truly humane society run democratically by the working class. Such a transformation will bring with it a transformation of consciousness and the elimination of the social conditions that fuel the pathologies associated with far-right violence and terror.



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