

# University of Texas at Dallas manipulating active COVID-19 case graph

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*The International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees will be holding a webinar on October 24 on how to end the coronavirus pandemic, with leading epidemiologists and scientist. Sign up here.*

The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) has been caught manipulating the active case graph on its COVID-19 dashboard in an attempt to downplay the severity of infections on campus.

UTD reopened fully in-person on August 23, with the result being at least 387 infections among students and staff. Before August 23, a total of 513 cases had been recorded among students and staff for the duration of the pandemic. That is, UTD recorded in less than two months into the school year three-quarters of the total infections for the whole duration of the pandemic before August 23. At least 900 students and staff have been infected since the start of the pandemic.

Tellingly, the university is holding its annual “State of the University” address virtually, releasing a recorded statement on October 19 instead of delivering it in person. This is an underhanded acknowledgment by university administrators of the dangers of in-person classes, while they are assuring students and staff otherwise.

Last month, Reddit user u/nolightallnight detailed in a series of posts on UTD’s unofficial Reddit page the significant and unexplained gaps in the official reporting of active COVID-19 cases, with cases appearing, and then the next day seemingly disappearing from the university’s dashboard.

A graph assembled by u/nolightallnight (accessible here) illustrates the gap between the “active cases” displayed by the university, and the actual feasible active cases at points 100 cases or more below the actual feasible cases.

The University Vice President for Student Affairs (UVPSA) Dr. Gene Fitch, Jr. responded on Reddit to the discrepancies saying, “It’s really disappointing to think that some of you believe that the data is being manipulated so UTD can benefit on some level, financially, from this pandemic. Our decisions have always been based on the science available to us and with the health and safety of our entire community in mind.”

Within minutes of the UVPSA response, the university’s active cases graph was taken down. It was only put back up two weeks later with no public statement made by the university on the errors in the graph. In place of the graph was a statement claiming the graph would be back up once “technical issues” were resolved, instead of admitting the discrepancies.

Dr. Rafael Martín, the Vice President and Chief of Staff for UTD, stated in an email to a UTD Student Government representative last Monday evening in response to questions about the dashboard, “We have taken down the dashboard as we discovered some errors in the way it was reporting case data. We hope to have it back up shortly.” This statement did not feature the graph, meaning most students would be left unaware unless they looked on the *unofficial* UTD Reddit page.

The fact of the matter stands that the university is essentially run as a business. Despite its “non-profit” status as a public university, top administrators including the president, dean and department heads make salaries well above \$400,000 per year.

Richard Benson, the president of the university, makes \$588,000 a year according to openpayrolls.com, with the dean, Hasan Pirkul, making \$485,000. At least 17 employees have an estimated yearly salary of \$400,000 or above, 47 make \$300,000 or above. Meanwhile the vast majority of university employees make far less, with average staff compensation at \$59,146 according to UTD’s 2021 staff compensation report, which is the median household income for Dallas County.

UTD’s administrators have real financial incentives to reopen fully in-person and keep the campus open despite the continued spread of COVID-19. Parking, on-campus housing, on-campus meals, and bookstore revenues are all affected by course modality, and most entail large profits from exorbitant costs. Parking permits range from \$144 to \$396 for Fall 2021 (excluding December). Collegefactual.com puts typical on-campus housing costs at UTD at \$7,442 a year, with \$4,090 for on-campus meals.

The transition to virtual learning had a real impact on UTD’s revenue. According to UTD’s 2020 annual financial statement, proceeds from auxiliaries for the university, which include parking, on-campus housing, and meals, fell from \$71.1 million in 2019 to \$23.5 million in 2020. The administration is no doubt aware of this fact. This was at the same time as an increase in average enrollment from 27,657 in 2019 to 28,490 in 2020, according to the university’s enrollment data, meaning that the fall in auxiliary revenue was not related to a fall in enrollment, but rather the modality change.

Instead of taking steps to combat the clear and present danger to students and staff posed by COVID-19, UTD has repudiated its limited safety measures, ending “de-densification” measures in classrooms on October 4. Students have opposed this, with a petition garnering over 1,600 signatures opposing the end of de-

densification measures. While the petition is aimed at limited and wholly inadequate mitigation measures, the statements in support, as well as the petition itself, hinted at the more fundamental, and frankly obvious, reasons that belie the claims of a “safe return” to school.

The petition states “University of Texas at Dallas is planning to completely densify classrooms because ‘Covid cases are down in North Texas.’ This statement is a lie according to the Covid stats by *New York Times*. Dallas county has the second highest Covid cases and deaths in Texas. Covid cases and deaths have doubled what they were in September of 2020. By going to full capacity especially as we are approaching winter, UTD is risking the health of all its staff and students.”

This is correct, but with the caveat that going back to in-person learning, period, puts students’ and staff health and lives at risk. The Delta variant of the coronavirus, a highly contagious airborne virus that has been documented to cause long-term complications and deaths in all age groups, appears to be more vaccine resistant. At least 361 students and staff were infected this semester before October 4 during so-called “de-densification,” despite 80 percent of students and 86 percent of staff being at least partially vaccinated.

Under conditions in which the virus continues to circulate around the world, in-person classes can and will cause mass infections, even with vaccinations and other mitigation measures. This was seen most strikingly at Duke University, which had 98 percent and 92 percent of students and staff, respectively, fully vaccinated, along with a mask mandate, and which saw mass outbreaks on campus in spite of these measures.

No systematic effort has been made on the part of the administration, media, or government to warn students or staff of the dangers to their health, quite the opposite. This has had the effect of leaving many in the dark on what lays in wait for them should they contract the virus. An in-depth examination of this question is outside the scope of this article, but students and staff must be made aware of the real severity of COVID-19:

- *Medical News Today* reported that Long COVID may affect almost 37 percent of those who contract COVID-19 some three to six months after diagnosis, with many debilitating symptoms, while 11.2 percent of children will suffer long-term issues from COVID-19. Many may suffer over a year after diagnosis.

- COVID-19 can involve significant damage to major organs, even in mild or asymptomatic cases, including heart damage, kidney damage, lung damage, liver damage, hearing loss and contributing to bringing on Type 1 diabetes. Mild impairment was found in patients’ hearts (32 percent), lungs (33 percent), kidneys (12 percent), and livers (10 percent), as well as pancreases and spleens.

- The cognitive impact of COVID-19 can be worse than lead poisoning or a stroke, with studies pointing to substantial cognitive performance deficits, and a documented loss in grey matter in the brain. Many may find themselves graduating with a degree rendered useless by cognitive damage from the virus, or flunking for the same reason.

- COVID-19 has killed more than the Spanish Flu in the US, with deaths as of this writing at 733,575, according to

worldometers.com

- College students have died from COVID-19, including at Texas A&M in August and University of North Carolina Wilmington in September.

The only publication to even mention the return at UTD amidst the pandemic, the student paper the *Mercury*, cravenly promoted the return to full in-person classes in an op-ed demanding “UTD should stay the course of full-density instruction” claiming it is “reasonably safe,” arguing that the academic outcomes matter more than the threat to life and limb that a deadly virus poses.

The YDSA, the youth movement of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which has a chapter on campus claiming 38 members, has remained silent on the obvious threat to students and staff. DSA-affiliated *Jacobin* magazine promoted proponents of “herd immunity,” a policy that allows COVID-19 to spread freely through the population, during the Trump administration.

Equally unsurprising, the unions have said nothing, either. The unions have spearheaded the reopening of in-person education at every level across the country, with the American Federation of Teachers partnering with fascist herd immunity proponents to continue promoting school reopenings so that workers can get back to work producing profits for the financial oligarchy.

Students and staff at UTD must build rank-and-file committees in order to fight for an end to in-person learning until the virus is eradicated, which epidemiologists estimate would take around two months, against the herd immunity drive by the ruling class. This fight can only be pursued independently of the ruling class, the Republicans, the Democrats and their pseudo-left accomplices, and the unions. Students should join the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and build a club at UTD. The IYSSE is the only youth movement actually fighting for a strategy which will eradicate the scourge of COVID-19.



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