RESOLUTION 1920-014

A RESOLUTION AGAINST THE PLAN TO RETURN TO CAMPUS

Authors: Author: Jack Brandl, Chief of Staff & Co-Chair, Equity and Racial Justice; Kathryn Holt, Chair, Arts and Culture; Aviva Neff, Chair, Academic Affairs; Abby Grief, Chair Healthy, Wellness and Safety; Verdaynea Eason (easonagondanou.1), Chair, Equity, Inclusion, and Diversity

Sponsor: Executive Committee

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students (CGS) is the representative body of all graduate students enrolled at The Ohio State University as established by Article II Section 1 of the CGS Constitution; and

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students or its appointed representative(s) have the power to act as an advisory agent on behalf of graduate students on all matters brought before personnel, committees, or agencies of The Ohio State University involving the interest of graduate students as established in Article 14 III Section 3 of the CGS Constitution; and

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing public health crisis with more than one hundred thousand Ohioans infected¹ and hundreds of thousands more affected by state efforts to mitigate the health risks posed by the pandemic; and

WHEREAS resuming on-campus operations requires tens of thousands of The Ohio State University students, staff, faculty, and other personnel to return to campus to learn, work, and live in congregate settings, increasing the risk of spreading the virus to all those in the University District community as well as the city of Columbus and Franklin County; and

WHEREAS many carriers of the virus are asymptomatic, increasing the likelihood of it being spread unintentionally between persons on The Ohio State University campuses²; and

WHEREAS several universities have announced plans to limit in-person interaction by utilizing mostly online learning, including Harvard, Princeton, Georgetown, Rutgers, and Indiana University, among many other institutions of higher education around the country³⁴; and

WHEREAS universities that have reopened in recent weeks have seen increased spread of COVID-19 in their communities, resulting in returns to online learning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Notre Dame, North Carolina State University and Michigan State University⁵; and

WHEREAS in the city of Columbus, Columbus State Community College, Columbus College of Art and Design, and Columbus City Schools, with the support of Mayor Andrew Ginther and Columbus City Council, have moved all learning online this fall; and

WHEREAS the nation’s top infectious disease experts — Dr. Robert Redfield, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and

¹ https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/covid-19/dashboards
² https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/7/20-1595_article
Infectious Diseases — fear the confluence of the autumn flu season and the COVID-19 pandemic will be, “one of the most difficult times that we've experienced in American public health”; and

WHEREAS these experts had hoped the rate of new COVID-19 cases would be 10,000 a day in the United States by this fall, but the nation is still experiencing 40,000 new cases a day and there are more than 5 million American cases overall; and

WHEREAS Franklin County has the highest number of COVID-19 cases of any county in the state of Ohio; and

WHEREAS the burden of health risk has not been adequately mitigated or shared through public health distributive justice, thus leaving our most vulnerable populations at greatest risk, including our students with disabilities; and

WHEREAS Columbus City Council has resolved that "[...]we now are witnessing a coronavirus pandemic which is shining a stark light upon the long-running racial divide - Black patients are dying in larger-than-expected, record numbers, COVID-19 is killing Black people at 2.4 times the rate of white people and Black people are disproportionately suffering in-part due to long standing, unaddressed health disparities as well as systematic racism and other socioeconomic inequities[...]" and the effects of this pandemic will have a greater impact on Black and brown people; and

WHEREAS the Big Ten athletic conference, of which The Ohio State University is a member, has postponed the entirety of their fall season due to COVID-19 concerns; and

WHEREAS confusion around the legal standing of the Buckeye Pledge in a court of law has invoked fear and distrust among many graduate students by pushing the burden of responsibility on to students and graduate associates instead of the desired collaboration and togetherness; and

WHEREAS The Ohio State University offers more than 12,000 courses online already per the Office of Distance Education and eLearning and, as the only Digital Flagship institution that ranks #1 in online undergraduate programs, Ohio State should be able to move all classes barring those that are absolutely require to be in person of its course offerings online and offer specialized, socially-distanced courses for areas of study that require in-person learning; and

WHEREAS there are multiple approaches for criteria and implementation of COVID-19 testing, but the current federal, state, and local reagent and other testing resources are not adequate enough to meet the demand necessary to fully monitor the health and safety of every student; and

7 https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/us
9 https://www.columbus.gov/racismresolution/
12 https://odee.osu.edu/program-60/searching-for-courses
13 https://online.osu.edu/about
WHEREAS the health risks posed by the reopening of campus for congregate events and activities—despite the updated procedures recently announced during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to all university students, staff, faculty, university personnel, and University District community—are far greater than the possible negative impacts of remote instruction on the student experience and university function as a whole; and

WHEREAS the stress of living through a global pandemic can have detrimental effects to mental health\textsuperscript{15}, bringing students back to campus runs the risk of distancing them from established support systems, and Ohio State does not have adequate counseling staff or resources to address the increased need for mental health support; and

WHEREAS The Ohio State University has offered no adequate and fully explanatory circumstances or timeline under which any in-person instruction would be terminated; and

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students recognizes that there are some graduate students who wish to return to campus to perform research activities, hone their face-to-face teaching skills, or other administrative tasks, and supports their freedom to remain in-person should it not compromise the health and safety of others; and

WHEREAS resuming additional and unnecessary on-campus in-person activities jeopardizes the ability of graduate students to continue in-person research by increasing the risk of the spread of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS the Council of Graduate Students has and will continue to engage with university leadership through committees, forums, and individual communications to resolve these issues.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students stands in opposition to the current university plan to reopen campus, begin unnecessary in-person instruction, and other congregate activity during one of the most severe and lethal pandemics in modern global history.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the Council of Graduate Students strongly urges the university to further restrict congregate activities such as classroom learning and in-person meetings that would require students, staff, faculty, and other personnel to be physically present on campus, unless those in-person activities are absolutely necessary and have no online alternative; these restrictions should continue until adequate testing, contact tracing, and isolation/quarantine resources are available and Franklin County is downgraded to a Level 1 Public Health Emergency\textsuperscript{16}.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of Graduate Students is both dissatisfied and disappointed in the university’s premature dissolution of the Pandemic Transition Task Force without transparent communication of the reorganized Implementation Team and in the overall lack of consideration for the health and wellbeing of its students, staff, faculty, and personnel — and the health and safety of the Columbus community at-large — in its decision to return to campus despite warnings by top health experts.


\textsuperscript{16} Adequate testing is defined as testing anyone engaging in congregate in-person activities at least every 48 hours; https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/08/03/study-recommends-testing-students-every-two-days-college-football-players-push-back
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of Graduate Students demands representation on the Post Pandemic Implementation Team and any further discussions on implementation, with additional representation to be granted to undergraduate students and professional students.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Council of Graduate Students directs its President, Vice President, and Chief of Staff to distribute this resolution to all proper leadership and authorities of The Ohio State University and its partners.

Approved: Yes/No

Date: ___8/24/20___

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Stephen J. Post, President