

# The Steering Committee

Suggested Agenda Item

September 7, 2021



MICHIGAN STATE  
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The Secretary for Academic Governance received the following communication from Assistant Professor Alison Bernstein, Chairperson of the College of Human Medicine's College Advisory Committee, on August 26, 2021:

By I am writing to bring concerns to the attention of the faculty senate. While I was very glad to see that MSU finally issues a vaccine mandate and a mask requirement for fall, there are many things that are unclear about implementation and enforcement that impact faculty, staff, students, and parents. The mandates imply a certain level of safety, but people need to be aware if enforcement and implementation is not where it should be.

A non-exhaustive list of my questions.

1. What are the criteria for religious exemptions? This is not a new area and there is a lot of literature on religious exemptions to vaccines. How is MSU making these decisions? How common are these at MSU? Who is making these decisions? What are their qualifications for making these decisions? Some people's reasons for claiming exemptions are factually incorrect. How does this play a role? (Examples include everything from misunderstandings about the basic facts about vaccines to full-on conspiracy theories.)
2. How are supervisors/faculty supposed to handle violations like people, not masking/ masking improperly? Who do we report to? What happens to those reports? What are the consequences for those who repeatedly violate these? Given the high level of overlap between those who won't wear masks and those refusing to get vaccinated, this is extremely concerning.
3. How are you getting an accurate estimate of vaccination coverage on campus? Relying on a voluntary survey filled out by a small percentage of the campus population is clearly not accurate and the university is requiring no actual proof. This seems like deliberate misinformation that leads people in our community to think they are safer than they are.

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4. How will you enforce that those who don't volunteer vaccine info or have an exemption participate in the Early Detection Program? What are the consequences if they don't participate?

It seems that an MSU-based comms campaign on vaccines, masks, and COVID mitigation measures is long overdue. I have many ideas for this! Running onsite vaccination clinics to make this convenient and easy for people as campus reopens would also help drive up vaccination rates. We can do a lot to address the "3Cs of vaccine hesitancy" - Complacency, Convenience and Confidence - with these measures.

In addition, this needs to be a policy in more than name only. It is nice that we get to say "MSU has a vaccine mandate," but without clear info on implementation, mechanisms for enforcement, and clear consequences, this is a toothless mandate. The entire MSU community deserves info on whether this is a mandate with teeth that will actually protect us.

Additionally, Faculty Senator Willie Wong of the College of Natural Science submitted a related concern on September 1, 2021, which read:

I've received a request from a constituent for a response from the administration concerning the university's COVID response.

The faculty member teaches a lab course, where students regularly share equipment during class. The faculty member sought guidance from Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) for safety guidelines to prevent COVID transmission (specifically for the use of shared microscopes during instruction). The response is that

1. EHS recommends decontamination of shared lab equipment between each use.
2. But as this is a recommendation and not a requirement, individual units are responsible (financially) for the procurement and implementation of mitigation strategies.

The question from the constituent faculty member and from myself is: **Isn't this kind of spending specifically what the COVID-**

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## **related stimulus funding that the university received is for?**

During previous Senate discussions it was explained to us that part of the COVID funding received can only be used toward operating costs incurred by the university to address the pandemic, it seems unreasonable to turn around and demand the costs be born by the individual instructional units.

It is possible that I do not fully understand the constraints on how the COVID stimulus are meant to be spent. If that is the case, I would demand that in addition to the summary spending document that we received over the summer, that the administration also publishes, for transparency, an account of the different tranches of money received as well as any and all rules that govern their expenditure.

The matters are referred to the Steering Committee for further action.