



Council of Graduate Students
The Ohio State University

Letter Encouraging the University to Include the COVID-19 Vaccine on Its List of Required Immunizations for In-Person Activity for Autumn 2021

Friday March 26, 2021

To: President Kristina M. Johnson

Cc: Dr. Melissa Shivers, Senior Vice President for Student Life

Dear President Johnson,

We, the incoming and outgoing leadership teams of the Undergraduate Student Government (USG), Council of Graduate Students (CGS), and Interprofessional Council (IPC) at Ohio State are writing to you today to express our support for Ohio State to update its immunization requirements to include the COVID-19 vaccination for students who participate in in-person activities, attend in-person classes, and utilize university housing, beginning in Autumn 2021.

This past week our peer Big Ten institution, [Rutgers University, communicated to its university](#) community that, "In support of Rutgers' commitment to health and safety for all members of its community, the University will be updating its Immunization Requirements for Students to include the COVID-19 vaccine." In our own state, Cleveland State University announced it would require COVID-19 vaccinations for students living on campus. We believe that Ohio State should join these institutions and continue to lead the state and the nation on student vaccination.

Vaccines are miraculous medical technology and exist to help provide safety, protect the most vulnerable, and ensure good health. As we strive to return students to campus as learners, teachers, and researchers, instituting this requirement would further bolster confidence in Ohio State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we know that the vaccine dramatically reduces the potential to contract COVID-19 and reduces the severity of symptoms, we also know that it is not a guarantee. If we require immunization for those who are able, students who may be medically unable to receive the vaccine could schedule and attend classes with the comfort that they are protected by their peers. Faculty, support staff, and teaching assistants would be able to arrive in classrooms in the fall with the confidence that the majority of the students they work closely with are vaccinated. This approach embodies "Together As Buckeyes". We must protect each other and reduce risk inequities across our campus so that we can return to in-person activity sooner, safer, and with more confidence.

We acknowledge that there are some who insist that there may be legal complications with such a requirement or that some may feel that universities should not be able to require immunization. We note that [a January survey](#) found that 71% of college students do believe that "colleges have the right to require students to get vaccinated before returning to campus." While (most of us) are not lawyers, we do note that there is [not yet a formal legal opinion on this matter](#) and there is a growing body of informal legal opinion indicating that this is a very gray area, and that universities [have a robust history of mandatory vaccine requirements](#). While the current vaccines that have received Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will not be formally approved for some time, the FDA has [stated in its guidance on EUAs](#) that individuals must be informed of "the option to accept or refuse the EUA product and of any consequences of refusing administration of the product." We believe that we should explore updating our immunization requirements with this guidance in mind. We must also provide a clear process for students to apply for

medical exemptions or to refuse for religious or ethical reasons and to be notified of the consequence(s) of being unable to attend in-person classes, activities, or reside in university housing.

We understand there will be many logistical challenges to solve to make such a requirement both feasible and equitable for all students. Our international students will be arriving with many different forms of documentation of vaccination, and we should be understanding and diligent in accepting and recording this documentation. International students who arrive on campus without the vaccination already should have the ability to quickly receive the vaccination if they so choose. For all students who choose to opt out of vaccination for COVID-19 for religious, ethical, or medical reasons the process must be simple and clearly communicated well in advance of fall semester. Additionally, we must continue our efforts to offer virtual and flexible hybrid course versions to ensure that students who opt out of the vaccine and would be unable to attend in person classes under this requirement would still be able to access necessary courses. Finally, we believe that we cannot allow a mandatory vaccine policy to create a false sense of security on our campus. We strongly support the university in continuing with masking, social distancing, and testing efforts in tandem with vaccination.

These are unprecedented and challenging times. We believe Ohio State should take bold action to protect its students, staff, and faculty, whatever potential challenges that may bring. We hope that you will take these views into account in your deliberations on the return to campus in Autumn 2021 and consider updating Ohio State's immunization requirements to include the COVID-19 vaccine for both students living in residence halls and attending in person classes or activities. We, as student government leaders, would welcome the opportunity to be partners in solving the challenges noted above which would accompany a mandatory COVID-19 vaccine requirement and look forward to discussing these issues with you more.

Together as Buckeyes,

Nick Messenger	Abby Grief
(CGS President-Elect)	(CGS Vice President-Elect)

Stephen Post
(CGS President)

Jordan Vajda	Shivani Patel
(IPC President)	(IPC President-Elect)

Jacob Chang	Anna Valerius
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