

A Call to Central Michigan University Senior Leadership: Sign [HERE](#)

Background

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has now spread to over 13.5 million people and has caused around 585K deaths worldwide. In Michigan, there are over 72,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and around 6,000 confirmed deaths as of 17 July, 2020¹. It is impossible to know the extent of the threat to CMU students, staff, and faculty and the greater Mount Pleasant and Isabella County community were CMU to resume classes for the fall semester in a face-to-face format. Close proximity in classrooms even with HyFlex as the mode of operation in dining halls, residence halls, and other crowded campus areas will inevitably increase infection rates. Much of CMU's strategy for health and safety of our community relies on individual responsibility to follow CDC guidelines and State or local orders and ordinances that intend to slow the spread of COVID-19 as outlined on the "Fired Up for Fall" page such as mandatory self-screening, social distancing, face masks and coverings, and cleaning and disinfecting². It is clear from evidence within the Mount Pleasant community currently, around the state just from 4 July weekend celebrations³, and Harper's Restaurant and Brew Pub in East Lansing⁴, that counting on individual responsibility is not a feasible or realistic risk management strategy. This strategy also relies on an assumption that CMU students have financial access to comply with the guidelines as aforementioned such as consistently purchasing adequate cleaning supplies and face mask coverings. This is particularly concerning given the fact that CMU administrators have been directed to not provide masks for students — a short-sighted and inherently inequitable directive not aligned with peer institutions around the state.

Social Responsibility and Stewardship of Isabella County

These concerns about the return to face-to-face fall instruction are compounded by the necessary consideration of particularly vulnerable members of our CMU, Mount Pleasant, and surrounding community. Compared to regions like Oakland County and Wayne County, where many Central Michigan University (CMU) students currently reside, Isabella County has been hit at significantly lower rates with just under 200 confirmed and probable cases and 8 confirmed deaths⁵. Fall 2019 on-campus enrollments as reported on CMU's website broken down by ethnic background totaled about 14,000 students⁶. This is a significant population increase for Mount

¹ https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173---.00.html

² <https://www.cmich.edu/firedupforfall/Pages/default.aspx>

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<https://www.metrotimes.com/news-hits/archives/2020/07/13/dozens-of-people-infected-with-covid-19-after-fourth-of-july-parties-in-michigan>

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<https://spartanswire.usatoday.com/2020/06/29/at-least-107-people-contracted-covid-19-after-visiting-harpers-brew-pub-in-east-lansing/>

⁵ https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173---.00.html

⁶

https://www.cmich.edu/office_provost/academic_administration/APA/Statistics/Pages/On-Campus%20Enrollment%20Reports.aspx

Pleasant and Isabella County and reveals real concerns about what it could mean for the infection of our surrounding community, to which it is our duty to be good stewards, if over 10,000 students were to return to the area for face-to-face instruction. This is especially concerning given the income disparities of Isabella County which holds the highest poverty rate for counties in the state of Michigan. According to Isabella County Restoration House statistics, 23% of the non-student population of Mount Pleasant is at or below poverty level⁷.

"To achieve our mission, we adhere to the core values of integrity, respect, compassion, inclusiveness, social responsibility, excellence and innovation."⁸ Given that healthcare, a living wage, affordable housing, unemployment benefits and additional COVID-19 relief efforts are not accessible nor available to many low-income individuals, it is a violation of our University's adopted core values of compassion, social responsibility, and integrity to bring students back to face-to-face instruction as it puts our community at risk in the interest of the University's bottom line. University leadership should also consider the local hospital systems' ability to care for large numbers of campus and community members who become infected as a result of a campus re-open. These same concerns related to socioeconomic status can be applied to many of our students.

Systemically-Made-Vulnerable Populations

Socioeconomic status is just one-way vulnerable populations must be considered. It is well documented that Black Americans have disproportionately been infected and died by cause of COVID-19 due to various inequities as a result of systemic racism⁹. According to the same aforementioned on-campus enrollment report, around 11% of our on-campus student population identify as Black or African American. It is possible, if not likely, that Black and African American students would face the very same systemic barriers to quality healthcare if (or when) COVID-19 begins to spread exponentially on campus as a result of a full fall reopen. The impact of COVID-19 has also been devastating for many Native and Indigenous communities¹⁰. This fact should be particularly concerning to the Central Michigan University community given our close proximity and long-standing relationship with the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. This long-standing relationship includes CMU's founding, which came at a dire cost to the Native peoples of this area including the violent stealing of the traditional territory of the

⁷ <https://www.icrhouse.org/wordpress/the-need/>

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https://www.cmich.edu/about/Pages/university_goals.aspx#:~:text=At%20Central%20Michigan%20University%2C%20we,citizenship%20in%20a%20global%20society

⁹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

¹⁰

<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/05/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-native-american-communities/>

Anishinabewaki peoples by settlers not so many years ago¹¹ — to put the tribal community at a higher risk of COVID-19 infection by fully re-opening campus in the fall would be a continuation of this legacy of violence.

All of this should also raise concerns to University leadership who have repeatedly, via email and blogs, reaffirmed CMU's commitment to inclusivity and addressing racism^{12 13 14}. These considerations of vulnerable communities only skim the surface of our social responsibility to consider the needs of marginalized populations and does not include in depth considerations surrounding risk of infection and lack of proper resources for those living with disability, chronic illness, or pre-existing conditions, those who are immunocompromised, those in age groups particularly at risk, etc. These populations are particularly vulnerable to fatalities and/or inability to have proper resources for day-to-day needs in the face of infection requiring time off from work, healthcare costs, etc. However; it should also be noted that even those who do not hold these identities or experience these conditions also have significant risk for similar adversities and fatality related to COVID-19.

Our Community

CMU students, faculty, and staff should not have to risk the health and safety of themselves, their friends, families, and communities to attend to the needs, responsibilities, and anxieties that come with a face-to-face campus reopen for the fall 2020 semester in the midst of a global pandemic. Students, faculty, and staff are, have been, and will continue to have to make difficult decisions as it relates to their employment, finances, health, their K-12 children attending (or not) face-to-face schooling, and more as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is Central Michigan University's duty and responsibility to make these decisions with people in mind, not profit or the bottom line. We make these requests knowing that moving away from face-to-face instruction requires other types of risks and sacrifices and we do not take lightly that many CMU employees have already been cut from full-time status, furloughed, or completely terminated in light of budget constraints due to the adversities of COVID-19. When lives are at risk, we must do what is hard, not what is easy or in the interest of the bottom line. If it has already been necessary to terminate CMU employees in light of circumstances thus far, it seems improbable that the University has the capacity to appropriately provide human resource support to janitorial and facilities teams to address the cleaning and sanitizing demands in classrooms and other busy campus spaces as a result of COVID-19.

¹¹ <http://www.sagchip.org/ziibiwing/aboutus/history.htm>

¹² https://blogs.cmich.edu/cmichprez/the_great_task/

¹³ <https://blogs.cmich.edu/cmichprez/our-promise-to-address-racism-and-hate/>

¹⁴ <https://blogs.cmich.edu/cmichprez/our-core-values-inclusiveness/>

By taking initiative now, CMU has the chance to save lives and do an immense amount of harm reduction for our surrounding community and CMU students, faculty, and staff. By making this decision in a proactive rather than reactive manner, CMU faculty and staff will also have more time to plan for a switch to all online instruction and student services. This is an opportunity for the University to lean into its core values of innovation and excellence in the interest of an online only learning experience that provides “student-centered education” and prepares members of the CMU community for “responsible citizenship in a global society.”¹⁵ This proactive decision is also conducive to preparing appropriate and proportional tuition reduction in light of a change to all online course work as well as refunds for relevant costs such as room and board. It is irresponsible for Central Michigan University to continue with face-to-face classes and allow campus to be re-opened for the Fall 2020 semester. Governor Whitmer’s declared state of emergency is still in effect and rather than declining infection numbers, Michigan is on the rise again¹⁶. Where we had recorded the lowest 24-hour COVID-19 increase in months on 14 June with newly 107 confirmed cases, we have seen as much as a 515% increase from that number as of 6 July with newly confirmed cases rising to 552 on that date¹⁷.

Our Demands

We are calling on the Board of Trustees, President Bob Davies, and other senior University leadership of Central Michigan University to take the initiative to close campus and halt face-to-face plans for Fall 2020 in order to slow the spread of this virus and stop a significant tragic impact on the Michigan, Isabella County, Mount Pleasant, and the CMU community.

We demand a COVID-19 response that puts people over profit. This includes:

- **Suspension of face-to-face classes and instruction for Fall 2020 with limited provisions similar to what has been offered during Summer II for labs, etc. that already have extreme safety measures in place.**
- **General campus closure with exceptions, similar to the start of the pandemic in March 2020, for students who may rely on campus room and board for shelter, food, and technology resources. This means there should be some access to residence hall**

¹⁵

https://www.cmich.edu/about/Pages/university_goals.aspx#:~:text=At%20Central%20Michigan%20University%2C%20we.citizenship%20in%20a%20global%20society

¹⁶

https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MIEOG/2020/07/14/file_attachments/1495465/EO%202020-151%20Emerg%20declaration.pdf

¹⁷ https://www.michigan.gov/coronavirus/0,9753,7-406-98163_98173---,00.html

This petition is written and presented in solidarity with various institutions across Michigan and the nation facing similar concerns as their higher education institutions also recklessly move forward toward face-to-face instruction for the 2020-2021 school year. The writer gives permission to campus leaders of other institutions to use the content of this document to petition their own institutions to implement similar demands.

occupancy, residential restaurant meal offerings, computer labs, and library resources.

- **Reduction of on-campus room and board fees for Pell grant eligible students, at minimum, and those with extenuating circumstances that need to utilize on-campus housing and food resources for Fall 2020**
- **Encouragement of and support for faculty to use open source, public-domain or low-cost alternatives for course materials given the significant financial burden of required textbooks and other course materials purchased through the Bookstore or otherwise.**
- **Protections for CMU employees such as significantly increased allocation of paid sick leave, paid family leave, and paid medical leave and continued supply of face masks and coverings by and for campus departments requiring in person work.**
- **Resources committed to the establishment of on-campus COVID-19 testing services available to campus and community members.**
- **A public commitment by CMU and CMUPD to not aid in the detention or deportation of undocumented students, faculty, or staff as well as those who commit non-violent crimes on campus especially as it is clear that jails and detention centers quickly become epicenters of COVID-19 spread and incarceration prevents individuals the ability to access critical community care.**
- **Significant resources redistributed and committed to campus resources such as Sexual Aggression Peer Advocates (SAPA), Sexual Aggression Services, the CMU Counseling Center, and the Center for Inclusion and Diversity due to their support of individuals of vulnerable backgrounds that experience racism, homophobia, transphobia, mental health concerns, sexual and domestic violence (which are often intensified during times of confinement), etc.**
- **Reinstatement and extension of deferred deadlines for student account payments and suspension of late payment fees and holds for past-due balances at least through January 2021.**
- **Extension of the withdrawal deadline and Credit/No Credit options for courses for Fall 2020 as well as retroactive withdrawal and Credit/No Credit options for Summer I 2020 and Summer II 2020.**
- **Reduction of tuition and related fees in light of a switch to online instruction that causes a loss of quality instructional hours, lack of easy access to critical academic resources, professors to teach in ways that are new and not familiar to them. All of this reduces the quality of education that CMU is able to offer. We firmly ask that tuition is lowered as long as CMU must continue with online only instruction.**

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- **Preparation for the highly likely scenario that requires the terms of this petition be extended to cover the Spring 2021 semester requiring that CMU wait until Summer 2021 or Fall 2021 for a full campus reopen and return to face-to-face instruction.**

History

The #NOTFiredUpForFall Coalition was started by CMU Graduate Student Autumn Gairaud and members of New America Project at CMU, Emily Jones, Francesca Farzalo, and Katie Pulaski. New America Project is a progressive organization at CMU that raises awareness and builds power around Co-Ilberatory Socialism through an intersectional coalition at CMU. Various other leaders of color on campus were advised in developing our demands. The #NOTFiredUpForFall coalition launched our petition on July 18th, collecting over 600 signatures in just a week. The petition and demands were emailed to President Davies on the 18th and a request for a response was made for the 28th by the end of business. On July 28th, our organizers dropped off over 650 signatures to the Office of the President. The President was informed that we expected a public response by that night, and that our coalition was prepared to escalate if there was push back. While we did not receive a clear public or private response from the administration, the following day, CMU launched more Fired Up For Fall promotional videos, further invalidating the many voices that we're demanding that CMU protect it's community over profit.

As our team promised, we then escalated and pulled off a successful Day of Action event the following week. Students, faculty, staff, family members, and community members came together to call, email, and tweet storm the President, Provost, and Board of Trustees to pressure them into making a morally sound decision. Unfortunately, our team and supporters were met with vague and standard responses from all targets stating, "We know many of our students prefer an in-person classroom experience, and many have expressed a strong desire to see their friends and mentors again." Therefore, risking other students' lives and silencing students that are not comfortable with returning, simply because they know students better than actual students? Yes, there are students that want to come back in the fall, but what about the students that are concerned? The administration is choosing to cherry pick which student voices they listen to, they are ignoring those students with chronic illnesses, immune issues, and students from communities that are being disproportionately affected by COVID-19. This response came at no surprise to us, CMU has a history of continuing a legacy of violence against the Anishinaabe people and Black students.

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After weeks of building relationships with students, faculty, and community members, we decided to escalate further against the administration. This decision came as cases began to rise during the second week of school. Our campaign decided to follow through with a banner drop, which happened last Monday. It got statewide and national press, with various amounts of feedback, mostly positive. Our campaign is looking to continue escalation as our admin took down each poster almost as soon as they were put up. After meeting with Matt Johnson, our team is excited to collaborate with the faculty union.

Our campaign further escalated with the Leaders for Liberation March on September 18th. We marched to President Davies' house to increase pressure, an action that hasn't happened in roughly 10 or 11 years.

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