

Resolution # 71-03

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association  
(GPSA)  
The Pennsylvania State University**



**of the 71st Assembly**

*Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,*

**Student-Faculty Unity Rally for Vaccine Mandate at Penn State  
Supporting the Coalition for a Just University (CJU)**

(Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

**Nature of the Situation:**

As of August 24, 2021, over 700 universities across the United States have COVID-19 vaccine mandates in place.<sup>1</sup> The need for such mandates is underscored by the rapidly rising case counts across the United States, largely fueled by the highly transmissible Delta variant.<sup>2</sup> This variant is not only more transmissible than the original strain of the coronavirus, but recent data highlight how the strain is associated with an increase in hospitalizations among 18-49 year-olds.<sup>3</sup>

After more than 15 months in the pandemic, there is no lack of awareness of the immense consequences of a rapid rise in COVID-19 cases. The first three waves saw burnout and mental health crises among students,<sup>4</sup> healthcare systems being pushed to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/list-of-colleges-that-require-covid-19-vaccine/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/covidview/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/COVIDNet/COVID19\\_5.html](https://gis.cdc.gov/grasp/COVIDNet/COVID19_5.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/college-students-increasingly-report-high-levels-of-anxiety-and-burnout-during-the-pandemic>

their limits,<sup>5</sup> and an insurmountable loss of life.<sup>6</sup> However, this time, we are not defenseless. COVID-19 vaccines are easily accessible across the country, and in and around University Park.<sup>7</sup> These vaccines have been proven to be safe and highly effective,<sup>8</sup> with unvaccinated people being 29 times more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19 than those who are vaccinated.<sup>9</sup> Further, on August 24th, 2021, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced a full approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine — underscoring the already established safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>10</sup>

Despite a number of universities in the Big 10 alliance and across the country mandating vaccines,<sup>1,11</sup> Penn State has failed to put in place any form of a vaccine mandate for its faculty, students, and staff. This is as the University has begun a complete return to in-person learning. With college towns being extremely susceptible hotspots for COVID cases and State College ranking as that second-fastest growing COVID hotspot in the US last fall,<sup>12</sup> we simply cannot look past the irreversible consequences of a lack of a vaccine mandate. A rise in COVID-19 cases in the Penn State community not only risks a pause on in-person learning and activities, but puts immunocompromised members of our community and unvaccinated children of students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community at extreme risk. These effects have already started becoming visible, and due to rising COVID cases and concerns about dwindling hospital beds, Mount Nittany Medical Center announced on August 24th, 2021 that visitors would not be permitted except in special circumstances.<sup>13</sup>

While a return to in-person learning is beneficial for many students and faculty, trade-offs cannot and should not be made between a return to in-person learning and the health of members of the Penn State community and their families. There has been no shortage of calls and protests from members of the Penn State and State College community for a vaccine mandate at Penn State.<sup>14,15</sup> Yet, these calls have largely been unheeded. On August 12th, 2021, President Barron attempted to justify the lack of a vaccine mandate by citing the political environment in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the need to have continued support from the Pennsylvania State Legislature.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Temple University, also a state-funded institution, has imposed a vaccine mandate for all members for their community aside from those with religious and medical exemptions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-idUSKBN28R21K>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.vaccines.gov/results/?zipcode=16802&medications=779bfe52-0dd8-4023-a183-457eb100fccc,a84fb9ed-deb4-461c-b785-e17c782ef88b,784db609-dc1f-45a5-bad6-8db02e79d44f&radius=5&appointments=true>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/08/24/cdc-study-shows-unvaccinated-people-are-29-times-more-likely-to-be-hospitalized-with-covid.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-approves-first-covid-19-vaccine>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.thelancet.com/2021/08/ohio-state-to-require-covid-19-vaccination-first-dose-by-oct-15/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://onwardstate.com/2020/09/16/state-college-americas-second-fastest-growing-coronavirus-hot-spot/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.statecollege.com/centre-county-adds-33-covid-19-cases-pennsylvania-reports-3622-new-positives/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.inquirer.com/education/penn-state-vaccine-mandate-protest-west-chester-20210824.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.statecollege.com/state-college-borough-council-joins-call-for-penn-state-to-require-covid-19-vaccines/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://news.psu.edu/story/665967/2021/08/12/administration/open-letter-penn-state-community-president-barron?utm\\_source=newswire&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=665952\\_HTML&utm\\_content=08-12-2021-22-04&utm\\_campaign=Penn%20State%20Today](https://news.psu.edu/story/665967/2021/08/12/administration/open-letter-penn-state-community-president-barron?utm_source=newswire&utm_medium=email&utm_term=665952_HTML&utm_content=08-12-2021-22-04&utm_campaign=Penn%20State%20Today)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.temple.edu/coronavirus/vaccines>

With the full approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and its widespread availability, the GPSA fails to understand why the University cannot instate a vaccine mandate for members of the Penn State community. It is critical that a vaccine mandate is put in place at the earliest to ensure the safety of all members of the Penn State and State College community and their families. To further amplify the need for a vaccine mandate at Penn State, the Coalition for a Just University (CJU) is holding a Student-Faculty Unity Rally on Friday, August 27th, 2021 at 3PM in front of Old Main.

**Recommended Course of Action:**

The Penn State Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) hereby supports the rally organized by the Coalition for a Just University (CJU), and stands by them in their calls for a vaccine mandate at Penn State. The GPSA shall also send a representative to the rally to speak on the need for a vaccine mandate.

Respectfully submitted,

**Sandeep Krishnakumar**  
Speaker of the Assembly  
Delegate, College of Engineering

President \_\_\_\_\_

Affirm Veto

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The Graduate and Professional Student Association