

A DECLARATION and REFLECTION on COVID-19 POLICIES by STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES of UNIVERSITIES and COLLEGES across the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and the WORLD, OCTOBER 2023.

When, at the end of any great or terrible storm, we emerge, as now we do out of three years of an unprecedented global phenomenon, into a moment of silence, we are presented an opportunity: an opportunity to pause, to reflect, and to evaluate those events which took place, and those actions undertaken, in the depths of the upheaval. Such is the moment we are now offered, and We, student representatives from across the United States of America, Canada, and the world, having been swept up in this storm of Covid-19 responses for the last three years, urge now serious reflection.

We were told that mask, vaccine, and lockdown mandates would be justified by their benefits, yet, in light of the incredible harms these mandates caused, such mandates cannot be justified today. An undeniable psychological toll fell on every student facing pressure from peers, professors, and university administration to comply with mandates, and many, denied face-to-face contact with others for over a year, found themselves forced to accept medical coercion under duress. Those who chose not to vaccinate (a choice owed to all people under a truly democratic society), whether for medical or personal motivations, were made outcasts; they were socially ridiculed, segregated, and blamed, losing scholarships, academic and social opportunities, jobs and internships, medical autonomy and privacy, their ability to see friends and family, all campus platforms for free and uncensored speech, and the most basic human rights of Compassion, Dignity, and Empathy. Those who suffered vaccine injuries were shunned and dismissed; with their stories suppressed, our right to informed consent was non-existent. And on every college campus around the world, in a time where dialogue should have been encouraged, and in those same classrooms where truth, depth, and critical thought were once avowed, all conversation was silenced. Students forfeited physical and emotional freedoms in pursuit of “doing good” or for the sake of convenience, believing the price would be only temporary, and sacrificing instead their self-integrity. Fear was empowered to run rampant; many, in this confusion, mistook fear for righteousness. Our sense of compassion was manipulated. And the world forgot its Humanity, for only a majority possessed by a blind madness can have convinced itself that dividing and hurting any part of its community, however small, is a just cause. The list of further freedoms lost or challenged during this time known as the Covid-19 pandemic is too extensive to be fully acknowledged here.

It is clear that modern academia and academic leaders have betrayed their commitment to the free and open exchange of ideas, allowing fear, and not reason or common sense, to triumph. The freedom of rational thought must be recovered, and, in order to do this, we must first restore the principles of the university: the quintessential fountain of ideas. Dialogue must again be the foundation of all institutions. Questions must be encouraged; differences of ideas must be engaged, the individual must be allowed to thrive and be valued above the group; and these principles must be maintained particularly in times of crisis. A commitment to values only in times of peace is no commitment at all. We must then return to the mottos of our universities: *Veritas* (Truth). *Lucem sequimur* (We follow the light). *Die Luft der Freiheit weht* (The wind of freedom blows). And above all, *γνώθι σεαυτόν* (Know thyself). The ancient Athenian halls of Plato’s Academia understood these principles. The medieval, golden castles of Baghdad’s House of Wisdom and the foundations of Europe’s first university at Bologna can attest to these promises. To our academics, as inheritors of these sacred institutions: it is time to return to these roots. To our fellow peers, students following in the steps of all generations of college students before ours—the students who protested the Vietnam War, stood for democracy at Tian’anmen, decried the rise of National Socialism in Germany itself in the midst of World War II: consider again who you are. Are you indeed brave enough to uphold the convictions you proclaim? Only when our individual integrity becomes greater than our disposition towards convenience and group safety will the balance again be tipped in favor of liberty and humanity.

We, therefore, as a body of students of this year, 2023, exercising our innate rights in voicing our concerns and unified with a common goal to prevent any similar situation from happening again, make our declaration here. Having experienced three years of a world that has betrayed its commitment to justice, in the spirit of freewill and freedom, we commit to standing strong in our refusal to comply with any mandates, present or future, which ask us to mask, vaccinate, or stay home without the right to choose, meaning not only the right to accept or refuse but the right to fully informed consent without coercion. We must heal and restore our generation and those generations who follow ours. The students of tomorrow’s world are looking up to us to do this; let our courage again be dedicated on behalf of Wisdom to the name of Truth and Integrity.

Signed on October 4, 2023 by student authors and co-signers.

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