

Survey Results Preview: How Have the University System of Maryland Covid-19 Mandates Impacted You?

March 2022

Students, faculty/staff, parents, and alumni in the University System of Maryland (USM) have spoken! It's time for USM leadership to listen to those impacted by Covid-19 Mandates.

In an effort to minimize future harm to the USM community, careful evaluation and consideration of the full impact of Covid-19 mandates predicate implementation of effective and successful policy practices.

Since the Chancellor's announcement of the system-wide Covid-19 Vaccine Mandate on April 23, 2021, USM has focused on reducing transmission. In the year since implementation, there has been no known assessment of the effects of the USM Covid-19 mandated policies on their constituencies. We present findings from a survey designed to capture the collateral impacts of the mandates.

We were curious about possible physical, psychological, academic, and/or financial impacts of USM Covid-19 mandates and associated policies.

In this document, we first describe survey methods and demographics of respondents. Then, we address three key areas pertaining to Covid-19 mandated policies:

- 1. Opinions about Covid-19 and mandated policies**
- 2. Unintended impacts**
- 3. Punitive consequences**

Methods

The survey was unsponsored and unfunded. Conducted over a short four-week time period between January 16, 2022 and February 19, 2022, the results represent a convenience sample of 307 individuals. The survey consists of 17 questions about impacts from USM Covid-19 Mandates, with six open response options. The survey was distributed to USM students and their families, as well as USM alumni, employees, staff, and faculty at UMD College Park, Towson University, Salisbury University, Bowie State University, University of Baltimore, UMBC, and Frostburg University via email, social media platforms, and word of mouth. Though not intended to be a scientific study, the survey is representative of thoughts, opinions, and experiences among a diverse range of USM stakeholders with educational and financial interests. Thus, while the data findings are not necessarily generalizable, our findings necessitate further attention from USM and individual institutional COVID-19 response leadership.

The survey is still open. New respondents welcome. Survey link [here](#).

Respondent Demographics

Of the 307 survey respondents, 187 were current USM students or employees, 96 were a parent of a student(s), 28 were alumni, and 14 were not directly affiliated with USM. (Note: 28 respondents qualified for more than one demographic. For example, a parent may also be an alumni or a student may also be an employee.)

Important Demographics about our 187 student/faculty/staff survey respondents:

- Student - Living on Campus: 69 (37%)
- Student - Commuter /Living in off-campus housing: 80 (43%)
- Faculty/Staff: 38 (20%)

Covid History of Respondents confirmed by PCR or Antibody test:

- Students: 54% have tested positive for Covid
- Faculty/Staff: 53% have tested positive for Covid

Vaccination Status of Student/Faculty/Staff Respondents:

- Fully up-to-date (with booster): 40%
- Received 1st and 2nd vaccine but not booster: 28%
- Exempt from vaccine (religious or medical): 32%

Student/Faculty/Staff Reasons for Getting Vaccinated:

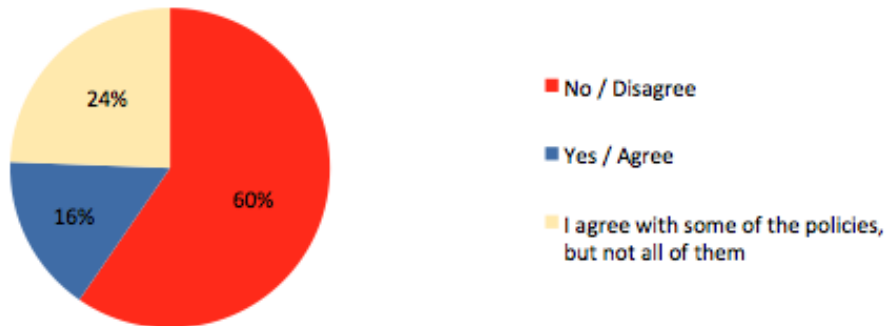
- To protect self and/or others: 50%
- To comply with USM mandates and avoid restrictions such as masking and testing: 50%

Opinions about USM Covid-19 Mandated Policies

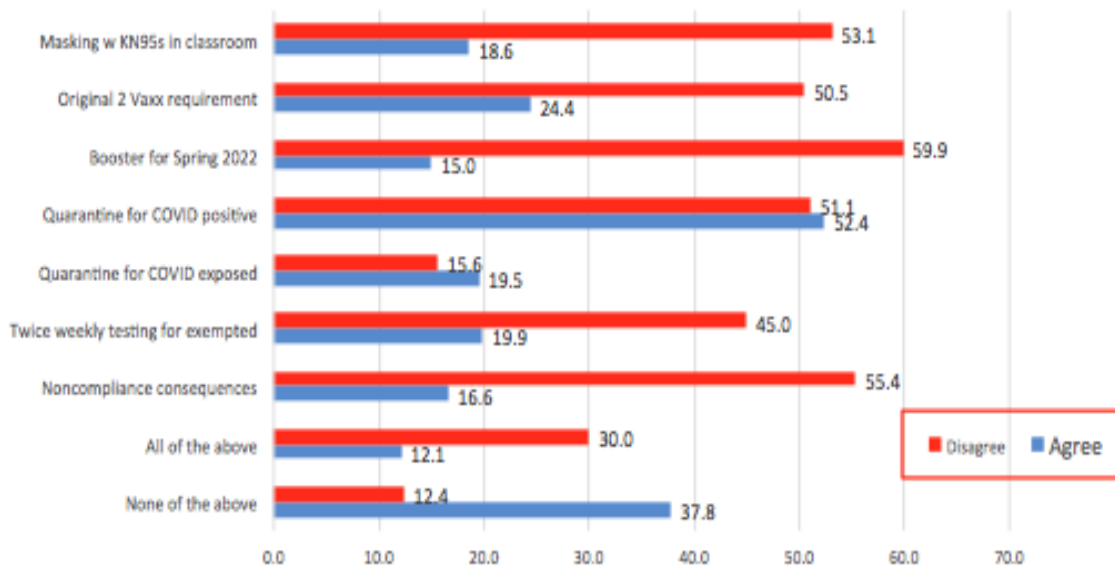
USM Covid-19 mandates and policies include:

- Wearing a face mask (KN95/comparable)
- Original vaccine requirement (2 doses of Pfizer/Moderna or 1 J&J) (Fall 2021)
- Booster vaccine requirement (Spring 2022)
- Quarantine period for Covid-19 positive
- Quarantine period for Covid-19 exposed/close contact
- Routine testing for exempted individuals (up to twice weekly)
- Punitive consequences for noncompliance with policies

Percent of respondents agreeing / disagreeing overall with USM Covid-19 mandates and policies (n=307):



Percent of respondents Agreeing / Disagreeing with specific USM Covid-19 policies (n=307; multiple responses were allowed):

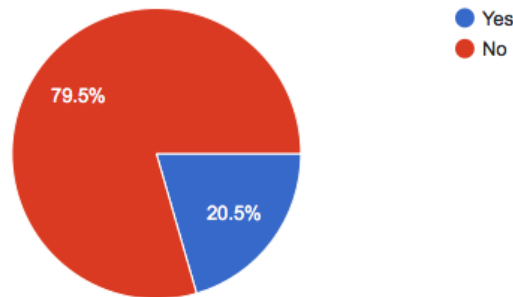


Respondents had the option to write in 'Other' USM Covid-19 policies for which they agreed/ disagreed; these include:

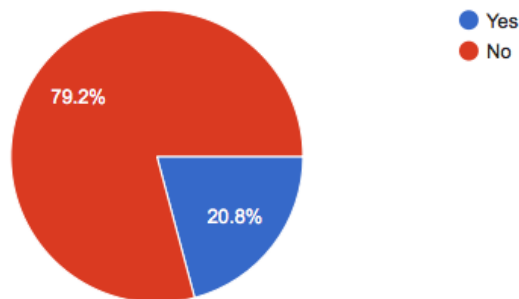
- Quarantine should only be required for COVID+ WITH symptoms (1)
- Policies should be more restrictive for the unvaccinated than the vaccinated (1)
- KN95 masks should only be required for unvaccinated individuals; vaccinated individuals should be able to wear any mask (3)
- There should be a USM policy that requires sick individuals to stay home
- KN95 masks should not be required indoors or in crowded outdoor situations (1)
- Sentinel testing should also be required for all vaccinated individuals (1)

- Asymptomatic individuals, regardless of vaccination status, should not require testing (1)
- There should not be serious consequences for policy non-compliance (1)
- Policies should consider natural immunity (1)
- There should be consistent policies for remote learning in case of quarantine (1)

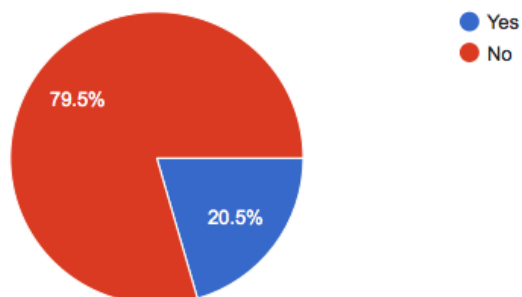
Percent of respondents who believe universities should have the authority to make decisions regarding the risk vs benefit of medical procedures / treatments for their students/employees (n=307):



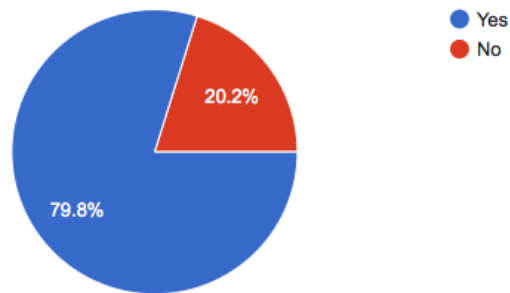
Percent of respondents who believe Covid-19 remains a serious public health threat on campus at this time (n=307):



Percent of respondents who believe the current USM Covid-19 mandates/policies are necessary to keep self and others safe (n=307):



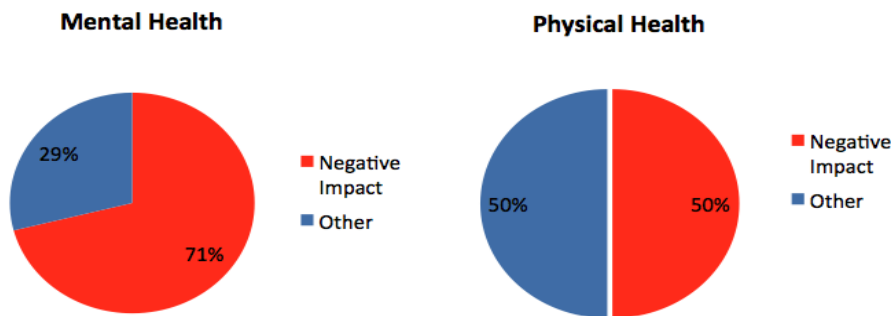
Percent of respondents who believe the current USM Covid-19 mandates / policies are harmful to students/staff (n=307):



Unintended Impacts of USM Covid19 Policies on Health

Percent of respondents who reported current USM Covid-19 mandates/policies negatively impacted their mental and physical health (n=187):

- 71% of students/faculty/staff reported a negative impact on mental health.
- 50% of students/faculty/staff reported a negative impact on physical health.

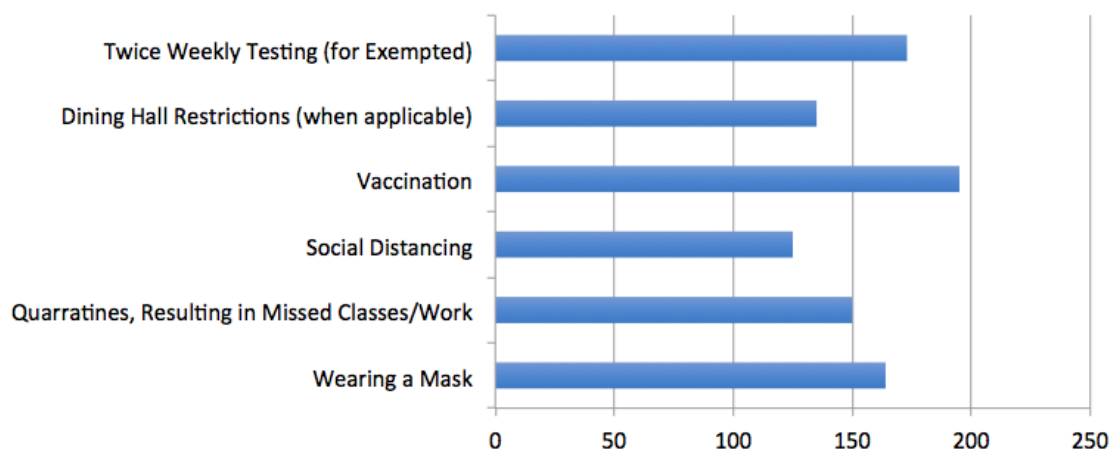


Respondents opted to provide 142 comments regarding the impact of USM Covid-19 policies on mental and physical health. An analysis of the comments indicated frequent mentions of several keywords/phrases; these keywords and the number of times they were mentioned in the comments are stated below:

- Psychological harm referenced (83)
- Physical harm referenced (66)
- Academic harm referenced (12)
- Depression/Anxiety/stress/ isolation/ostracized (95)
- Discrimination (9)
- Vaccine injury (7)

**see addendum for examples of respondent comments about how respondent's mental or physical health has been negatively impacted*

Student/staff respondents identifying which USM requirement(s) are harmful (n=187; multiple responses were allowed) :



Number of respondents considering leaving/transferring to a school with less restrictive Covid-19 policies or already transferred or took time off from USM. Parents of students had the option to respond to this question as well (n=307):

- Yes: (143)
- No: (89)
- Already transferred: (7)
- Not applicable: (68)

Punitive Consequences of USM Covid-19 Mandates and Mandated Policies, including Covid-19 Vaccination, Covid-19 Booster, Testing, and Masking

Students/faculty/staff who have COVID-19 vaccine exemptions or individuals who are not up to date are required to test twice weekly for Covid on several USM campuses. At other campuses, testing is required once weekly for these individuals. At times, some have been out of compliance with this policy for a variety of reasons, including illness, car troubles, scheduling conflicts, and family emergencies. System 'glitches' have also caused individuals to be incorrectly flagged as out of compliance..

Out of 68 students/faculty/staff with exemptions who responded, 51% reported receiving at least one punitive consequence for being out of compliance. Respondents were able to choose more than one response if applicable. The most common responses included:

- Denied internet access (13)
- Denied access/locked out of housing/dormitories (10)
- Denied entry to the dining halls for meals (10)
- Denied access to classes (8)

- Referral to the office of student conduct (7)
- Denied enrollment or disenrolled from the school (7)

Additional consequences (reported below) occurred less often or in individual cases. These consequences may have been given for other reasons than being out of testing compliance, such as for being unvaccinated or not up to date with vaccinations:

- Publicly asked to leave class by professor (either temporarily or permanently)
- Loss of on campus job due to not being vaccinated (exemption refused)
- Loss of approval to travel for job; no reimbursement allowed if employee opted to travel to work event anyway.
- Banned from sporting events
- Threatened with losing job
- Threatened with receiving a failing grade in a class
- 10 day ban from campus. Meetings with administration. Punitive review of policy videos. Required essay on policy improvement regarding videos. Required apology letter.
- Forced to use sick leave when quarantining even though job could have been performed from home
- Denied access to campus buildings

Students/faculty/staff were asked to share punitive consequences they received for not wearing a mask, or not wearing a mask properly (e.g. below the nose). The most common consequences reported were:

- Verbal warnings
- Kicked out of class and/or the building
- Written referral to the office of student conduct or human resources
- Threatened to be removed from sports team
- Reprimanded when mask falls down at the gym while exercising
- Reprimanded for lowering mask in order to drink/eat

Addendum

Examples of respondent comments regarding negative impacts on mental and/or physical health- paraphrased

Employment:

- Under mental duress, being expected to take a booster shot has more risk than benefit; if I don't, may lose job, health insurance, and way to pay bills and take care of family
- Ostracized in my office: only one with an exemption, no one will even talk to me anymore.
- Terrible anxiety exacerbated by being required to do weekly testing / daily scans yet vaccinated people are not required to do the same & scared if I don't I will lose my job. Was a time only unvaccinated people had to mask & would judge me as disease carrying because that's how it's portrayed by the university and in the media. Have never felt this type of discrimination before which caused me a lot of emotional pain and tears.
- Coercion under the guise of implied consent. Consent or be fired. What choice do you have? You have a family and need a job. Or be fired, lose your retirement, kids college. Harassed to submit to something against your values and belief. Yes it negatively impacted my life for a period of time.
- Constantly worried about getting fired and being unable to provide for my family.

General:

- Stressful having to take vaccines not fully approved and not know long term effects.
- *Physical health:* the mask doesn't allow proper breathing, limits field of vision & makes it hard to understand others.
Mental health: arguments regarding these overreaching and harmful policies within my family was nothing I have ever experienced before; turning parents and their children, husband and wife against each other, creating irreparable division within the family.
- Lack of recognition for natural immunity; lack of acknowledgment of the risks involved is very frustrating as we know COVID-19 vaccine injured people. Lack of respect shown by the university for ability of staff/faculty/students to make own decisions.
- Punitive actions against those who disagree with mandates seems more about control than public health. Fact that vaccinated and unvaccinated alike spread the virus eliminates the public health rationale for forcing all people to get the vaccine. Rejection

Examples of respondent comments regarding negative impacts on mental and/or physical health - paraphrased (continued)

of robust discourse and dialogue regarding these policies seems to be the antithesis of the mission of the University.

Academic Harm, Physical/Psychological Harm, Denied Access to Food & Housing, etc.

- *Physical Health:* Violent allergic reaction and was sick for a few weeks after receiving it (vaccination). Couldn't do schoolwork effectively or perform my job duties as well while sick.
Mental Health: Didn't want to take something that was new and not know the long-term effects.
- Gained 40 pounds during lockdown and got myocarditis from the vaccine. Lost most of the weight over the past year, but since getting myocarditis from the Pfizer vaccine it has been hard to exercise.
- Student was declined access to food resources already paid for - family has limited additional finances. Student couldn't eat for several days because the rescheduling times and dates weren't available for testing. Caused physical harm and mental stress to student and mental stress and worry for entire family. Also affected student's grades. Family not reimbursed for meals student was unable to receive.
- In fall 2020 and spring 2021 if I missed a weekly testing, couldn't get a reschedule timely (several days) and I'm food insecure financially; rely on my meal plan. Would miss several days of access to the meal plan and any nutrition whatsoever. Once it took 4 days and I was unable to eat for 3 of those days.
- *Physical health:* Missed Covid testing appointments multiple times, and have lost access to the dining hall for days on end as well as access to the campus gym. Without access to these places just because of a missed test (had other requirements because of a busy college students schedule, including being a student athlete), I have been excluded to improving my physical well being.
Mental Health: Working out heals my mental health greatly, so when I can't go to the gym it affects me as a whole.
- Student removed and locked off campus three times while vaccinated roommates tested positive. Student was forced off campus despite remaining healthy each time, and tested negative. Student was kicked out longer than the sick kids because of exemption policy (medical). Student's grades and mental health suffered, for no valid reason."

Examples of respondent comments regarding negative impacts on mental and/or physical health - paraphrased (continued)

- Constant stress: Will I test positive? Then quarantine.
What if tests aren't uploaded before class and I get yelled at and kicked out of class?
- Twice weekly mandated testing resulted in severe anxiety. On multiple occasions I have woken up in the middle of the night in fear I missed one. Punishment for two missed testing days-- not being allowed to be a student anymore-- is severe and unnecessary.
- Have been late to classes due to tests not working properly or being delayed. Testing is held on a part of campus that is only residential and campus shuttle stopped working for a while, requiring a walk across campus in the rain and in the cold.
- Testing facilities do not have proper heating or AC with 20 minute wait times in very hot or extremely cold temperatures. Multiple times, left the testing area with my teeth chattering. Vaccinated did not have to get tested ONCE, not even at the beginning of the semester, despite also being able to get and spread the illness. Left me feeling isolated and alone, as well as exhausted from the mental toll of it all (including: severe consequences of missed tests, late to classes due to testing error/delays, time & physically intensive effort to test)
- Exposure protocol: unvaccinated must quarantine for two weeks regardless of testing negative on multiple occasions. Resulting in missing class, falling behind, decline in grades. Unvaccinated are ostracized and receive unfair treatment, unlike vaccinated peers.
- Unvaccinated: twice weekly testing, longer quarantine periods, singled out on attendance sheets. This all makes attending school very difficult and draining.
- Last year my daughter cried to us almost every night how lonely she was and her sorority girl suitemates were going out to parties and eating together. She went back to school to meet people in the dining halls and libraries and classes and was so sad and found that spending all day in a small room on her computer was very difficult. Having to be scared about people finding out her vax status while being on a line to get a test twice weekly is very time consuming and extremely stressful. Testing should be at someone's convenience if they are feeling unwell, not just to be a statistic and target.
- Emotionally distressed when USM originally announced the vaccine mandate: felt alone and hopeless.

Examples of respondent comments regarding negative impacts on mental and/or physical health - paraphrased (continued)

- Discrimination experienced as unvaccinated, COVID- recovered students, coupled with extreme isolation resulting from not being able to meet and socialize in peer groups has caused two of my college children to seek ongoing counseling. One spent a week during last fall semester in a crisis center. Neither are returning for the spring semester and both are within a year of graduation.
- Student recently had to drop out of SU to enroll into a mental health program after the never ending mandates and isolation! Couldn't continue under the doom and gloom and intense fear of the virus type environment on campus. Student did not suffer from addiction nor had mental health issues prior to fall 2020.
- USM caused stress and extreme anxiety because policies defy common sense and science. Student decided to transfer to get away from your control over HER body.
- Being forced to get a vaccine I did not want has made me feel I have lost my freedom as a person. Getting the vaccine against my own will has made me constantly have doubt and regret.
- *Mental Health:* USM has made me feel less than my peers because I didn't get the vaccine and need to go through testing twice a week.
Physical Health: my immune system has diminished from constantly wearing a mask.
- Restrictive policies are hurting the mental health of students and causing conflict in families. Because of these mandates, student has decided not to go to Towson where sibling is a senior.
- Quite a bit of stress with booster mandate, with ample evidence showing potential risks of increased vaccination of mRNA vaccines among young persons. Has led to potential of dis-enrolling from University of Maryland and moving out of state, something I don't want to do, but the university hasn't given me much say in the matter.
- Isolation and judgment from the university, being an outsider, unwanted, not as valued because I am not vaccinated. Punitive consequences are ridiculous. Feeling so alone because of the strict rules freshmen year. Makes me want to transfer.
- Feeling discouraged - most friends at other universities are experiencing no restrictions with very little impact on their health while we have very tight restrictions.

Examples of respondent comments regarding negative impacts on mental and/or physical health - paraphrased (continued)

- *Mental health:* Covid 19 mandate made me feel powerless. Strong belief in my immune system and have strengthened it naturally for my whole life - making decisions for my own self and own body.
Discriminated against for not getting the vaccine by the University being covid tested twice a week. Never once had a positive test or symptoms of Covid-19 and I saw my peers with the vaccine catch the coronavirus.
- *Mental health:* Felt very discriminated against as unvaccinated by my coach who singled me out to follow Covid-19 protocols and wear my mask properly insinuating I would be kicked off the team if I did not comply every single second to wear my mask all the way over my nose inside the buildings. Causing stress and anxiety since coach would have captains watching over me like a hawk to report back the second I lifted my mask off to drink any water. Felt anxious in these uncomfortable situations and could feel myself unable to breathe correctly. I had to remind myself to take deep breaths to remain calm, remembering that I was there to play the sport I loved.
Physical health: impacted having to wear my mask while doing activities like lifting and being in classrooms for extensive time without sufficient oxygen to the point where I feel lightheaded.
- Ostracized for sharing that I am exempt from the vaccine, can't find friends.
- Gained weight, have depression and anxiety which I previously did not have. Have complied with all mandates and have tested positive for covid at my school. After 2 years, the mandates had a worse effect on me than the actual covid did.
- *Mental health:* A lot of unnecessary stress added when having to worry about conforming to all of the requirements and thinking about consequences of failing to meet them in addition to also being anxious about doing well in school.
Physical health: Masks (especially KN95 masks) make it incredibly hard for me to breathe. Several instances feeling nauseous or lightheaded and had to leave the classroom in order to get fresh air, leading to a loss of important class time (notes, lecture, etc.).
- All online freshman year and had a hard time making friends. Basically just locked in a single dorm room alone doing online school. Would sometimes go days without having a real conversation with someone.
- *Mental health:* extremely impacted by USM covid policies. Not being able to see other students' faces has made interactions less appealing: therefore, I have not had very much face to face talk with classmates. *Academic:* Also makes classes less exciting, most students don't want to talk since they do not know who their classmates are or

Examples of respondent comments regarding negative impacts on mental and/or physical health - paraphrased (continued)

what they look like. Zoom classes and teachers wearing a mask makes learning experience much harder since I can not see the teachers face when they are lecturing. This makes me zone out more and I tend to write down less material and learn less than if I could actively engage with the teachers. In a zoom lecture, I don't feel involved with anyone in the class, classmates and teachers included, therefore I don't find classes appealing anymore or even have the desire to log on and attend class in the first place.

- Feel like I am being discriminated against having to test 2 times a week even though I have antibodies and am not sick.
- *Academic:* (medical exemption) Quarantine on three separate occasions due to vaccinated individuals testing positive. Even though I was negative each of these times, and have natural immunity, I had to miss 6 weeks during Spring and Fall semesters of 2021 (or 1/5th of classes and labs). Because my classes were all in person, and I am in a laboratory heavy degree pursuit, I missed a tremendous amount of work. Before these past semesters, maintained a 4.00 GPA. Missing this much class resulted in a 3.7 GPA; worsening my chances of getting into Medical School.

Mental Health: Due to the noncompliance of others, unfair and not CDC approved policies mandated for unvaccinated individuals, my grades have suffered, which contributed greatly to my decreased mental health. Spending such a significant time-frame in isolation has also made some of my friendships fall apart, which made my mental health even worse.

Financial: Lost a lot of money due to wasted pre-paid Housing and Dining, and lack of work (two jobs on campus). This financial stress has also contributed to my deteriorating mental health.

Physical health: Have not been able to eat well because I have had less money- due to the financial stress previously mentioned. Also had to cut down times going to the gym because I simply had no time due to the copious amounts of makeup work. I am not anti-vaccination, but I am anti-mandates that are not supported by science.