



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Faculty Senate

Joseph M. McShane, S.J., Hon. President	Gregory Acevedo	Margo Jackson	Aditya Saharia
John Drummond, President	Andrew Albin	Judith Jones	Falguni Sen
Dana Alonzo, Vice President	Ida Bastiaens	Mark Mattson	Henry Schwalbenberg
Francesca Parmeggiani, Secretary	Thomas Beaudoin	Matthew McGowan	Grace Shen
	Jeffrey Colon	Alesia Moldavan	Grace M. Vernon
	Stephen Grimm	Haim Mozes	Ian Weinstein
	Ralf Hepp	Giorgio Pini	
	Amir Idris	Berish Rubin	

Present: Senate President Drummond; Senators Acevedo, Albin, Alonzo, Bastiaens, Beaudoin, Colon, Grimm, Hepp, Jackson, Jones, Mattson, McGowan, Moldavan, Mozes, Parmeggiani, Pini, Rubin, Saharia, Schwalbenberg, Sen, Shen, Vernon, Weinstein

Excused: Senators Idris

Guests: Dr. Shannon Magari, Principal and Vice President, Colden Corporation; Dr. Dennis Jacobs, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs; Mr. Marco Valera, Vice President for Administration & COVID-19 Coordinator

Call to Order

At 1:00 p.m., Senate President Drummond called the meeting to order.

Invocation

Senator Pini delivered the invocation.

Presentations and the ensuing discussion revolved around two main topics: the booster mandate and the University's decision for in-person teaching at the very start of the semester.

In her opening remarks, speaking from a Public Health perspective, Dr. Magari reflected on the role vaccines and boosters play in the Covid-19 pandemic, from preventing illness to slowing the development and spread of new variants while helping the public and private health systems from being further overwhelmed. She noted that last year, data from around the globe showed a waning of the immunity gained through Covid-19 vaccination, and institutions had to make projective decisions based on available data in order to ensure the safety of their communities. By strengthening the body's immune defense against Covid-19, boosters provide enhanced protection when the effect of the vaccine is waning. With regard to their safety and effectiveness, Dr. Magari commented that no "unusualness" has been reported, although concerns about short- and long-term effects of overexposure to polyethylene glycol (PEG) through mRNA-based vaccines and over-vaccination have been raised and further research is needed.

With regard to the University's booster mandate, Dr. Jacobs noted that individuals who have medical reasons for not receiving a booster shot should make them known to the institution. A booster exemption process, based upon a third-party review, is in place as it has been for vaccine exemptions.

As coordinator of the University's response to Covid-19, Mr. Valera reiterated that the boosters are designed to be safe and confirmed that an exemption process is in place, and can be initiated by

contacting Human Resources and by completing the Reasonable Workplace Accommodation Request Form.

The Senators and faculty members in attendance posed several questions in the ensuing discussion. With regard to boosters and the booster mandate, some senators asked about evidence of boosters' effectiveness in lowering the viral load and slowing down transmission of the disease, and the role boosters play in preventing severe cases and hospitalization with Omicron, the dominant Covid variant at present. Dr. Magari indicated that current data is unavailable or pending. With respect to vaccinated individuals who have nevertheless contracted Covid, more data is needed about demographics and antibody levels.

Other Senators asked why a mandate is a good idea since data is either insufficient or no longer current. Dr. Magari reiterated that evidence clearly shows that immunity after vaccination is waning. With regard to Fordham's requiring the booster for all faculty, staff and students who do not have an exemption, Mr. Valera pointed out that the decision was made in consultation with our epidemiologist and following the recommendations of local, state and federal health officials. He also noted that the other major residential Universities in New York City, Columbia and NYU, have also mandated the booster for all. Dr. Jacobs elaborated further: the University is following CDC, NYS and NYC Departments of Health guidance and recommendations to slow down the spread of Covid-19 in the Fordham community and provide a safer environment for all its members. He also underscored that the University, which is among hundreds of similar institutions tackling the same challenges, has been very thorough in addressing public health concerns. Decisions have been made not arbitrarily but based on the available data for the benefit of the entire community. Compared to the beginning of the pandemic, we are not in a state of complete ignorance. However, while evidence is accumulated over time, the University must take action in the present, under pressing circumstances, with the available data.

Senators and faculty members also raised concerns about the ethical dimension of the mandate, which also seems at odds with the University's commitment to social justice. Some underlined the need to preserve and respect individuals' consent for procedures that may have side effects or other medical implications. Others noted the ethical objection to boosters when, as reported by the World Health Organization, many in the world still have no access to vaccines and have not been vaccinated. Dr. Jacobs commented that adverse reactions to vaccines and boosters are considered in the decision making process. He acknowledged the need for an equitable distribution of vaccines in the world, but added that Fordham's vaccine supply, if unused, would most likely be discarded as it could not legally be redirected to other countries.

With regard to the University's decision to return to in-person teaching immediately at the start of the semester, senators and faculty in attendance expressed grave concerns and voiced strong objections to the Administration's policy, which they felt places faculty and students at risk and is generating greater anxiety among them. Dr. Jacobs clarified that the University's decision was based on two intertwining priorities: the commitment to delivering on the promise of a Fordham education and the commitment to ensuring a safe environment. While Omicron has a higher transmission rate than previous variants, the University is doing everything it can to balance mission and safety. The mitigating measures – the booster mandate among others – that the University has adopted aim precisely to ensure that students can safely be together in community as they pursue a quality education. Data from NYC Department of Health show that the peak of the current surge in Covid cases occurred in early January, and we are now coming down quickly. While the University anticipates that a manageable number of students will be coming in and out of isolation at the beginning of the semester, it decided not to pre-emptively pivot to online teaching given the mission-driven academic priority and the adopted mitigating measures.

Senators commented that the policy will generate more disruption and isolation than quality education, that Fordham's mitigating measures are predicated on the idea that Fordham is a "safe bubble" when in fact circumstances and experiences continuously challenge that assumption, and that the University should listen to faculty's and students' concerns more carefully, and attend to their needs more efficiently. Senators asked for a streamlined and clearer exemption and accommodation process, more flexible and attuned with individual household situations and cases than the current one, and better communication and support. As a case in point, Senate President Drummond urged the Administration to provide better communication on the University's provision to give antigen tests to individuals in isolation prior to their safe return to campus.

At 2:27 p.m., the Senate unanimously approved a seconded motion to extend the meeting to 2:45 p.m. and allow for further discussion.

At 2:45 p.m., the Senate unanimously approved two seconded motions, the first to further extend the meeting, the second to enter executive session. During the executive session, the Senate considered the following topics: the status, openness and process of the Presidential search and the booster mandate.

Upon exiting executive session at 3:12 p.m., the Senate passed the following resolutions:

#1 In light of the data, comments and concerns discussed and expressed at the Special Senate meeting held on January 14, the Senate requests that the Administration retract the decision to mandate booster vaccinations for the Fordham community and replace it with a very strong recommendation to receive the booster shot. (12-3-2)

#2 In light of the data, comments and concerns discussed and expressed at the Special Senate meeting held on January 14, the Senate requests that the Administration permit faculty members to choose their teaching modality for the first two weeks of the spring semester. (16-0-0)

#3 The Senate requests that faculty representation on the committee that is involved in decisions regarding the University's planning to deal with the Covid pandemic be restored. (15-0-0)

The meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 3:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Francesca Parmeggiani, Secretary