



FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Faculty Senate

Tania Tetlow, Honorary President

John Drummond, President

Ralf Hepp, Vice President

Christopher GoGwilt, Secretary

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Ida Bastiaens

Michael Baur

Thomas Beaudoin

Jeffrey Colon

Christopher Dietrich

Lauri Goldkind

Amir Idris

Judith Jones

Sharif Mowlabocus

Haim Mozes

Giorgio Pini

Tamique Ridgard

Berish Rubin

Aditya Saharia

Falguni Sen

Henry Schwalbenberg

Grace Shen

Grace M. Vernon

Ian Weinstein

Lori Wolff

Present: Senate President Drummond; Senators Alleyne-Green, Baur, Beaudoin, Dietrich, GoGwilt, Hepp, Jones, Mozes, Mowlabocus, Ridgard, Rubin, Saharia, Sen, Schwalbenberg, Vernon, Weinstein, Wolff

Excused: Senators Albin, Bastiaens, Goldkind, Idris, Vernon

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

Call to Order

At 4:31 p.m. Senate President John Drummond called the special meeting to order (via Zoom). Welcoming invited guests, senators, and guest faculty, he explained that the purpose of the meeting was to repair the breakdown in communication between the administration and the faculty concerning the latest mandate for the bivalent vaccine. He said he hoped that this meeting would serve as a forum more like the fora jointly organized by the Administration and the Senate at the outset of the pandemic.

Remarks – President Tetlow

President Tetlow opened with general remarks about the decision to mandate the bivalent booster. Acknowledging that evidence is still being gathered on the efficacy of the booster, she noted that the CDC's review of the data provided the authoritative scientific basis for the university's decision. She said that the mandate was intended to ask the university community to do the work necessary to protect the most vulnerable among us. She also noted that anyone fearing adverse health effects from the booster or having personal religious objections to taking the booster may apply for an exemption; that notes from physicians are not required; and that the University is granting exemptions more fulsomely than previously. Recognizing that there are strong feelings both for and against the mandate, and that there is no decision that would not be controversial in this regard, she underscored that her commitment was to ensuring the safety of the university community. She also expressed eagerness to hear faculty share their wisdom and perspectives.

Remarks – Provost Jacobs

The Provost acknowledged that the administration missed an opportunity to engage in discussion early in the semester on the mandate question. He apologized for the breakdown of communication. He then reviewed the history of the university's responses to the pandemic, noting that, since the development of the vaccine, the university's policy has been consistent, seeking to ensure that all members of the community be fully vaccinated. The university remains committed to the health and safety of the community, while respecting the integrity of individual decisions about personal health. Addressing the decision to mandate rather than merely strongly

recommend the booster, the Provost noted that, despite the CDC's strong recommendation, only about 8.4 % of the population had received the bivalent booster.

Remarks – Vice President Marco Valera

VP Marco Valera reviewed the preventive measures Facilities put in place since the onset of the pandemic. The filtration systems have been upgraded (and operate at the fairly high level of 13) with all buildings still operating using 100% outside air. The filters are changed about every three months. For the HEPA stationary filters (at Rose Hill) there are now weekly inspections. Since these are in public spaces, if faculty see any problems they should alert Public Safety. The regular cleaning of bathrooms and other areas has not changed since the height of the pandemic.

Remarks – Dr. Shannon Magari

Dr. Magari addressed a range of issues bearing on the decision to mandate the bivalent booster. Reiterating the Provost's point that nationwide the percentage of the population taking the booster is very low, she outlined the dangers posed by the virus including the numbers of deaths, the rising rates of infection in the Bronx and New York, and the fact that we are entering respiratory virus season. She cited new data showing the effectiveness of the booster in reducing infection, and helping prevent severe illness and death amongst those infected. She acknowledged that we would not know the full effectiveness of the bivalent booster until April or May 2023, but argued that now was the right time to mandate the booster in order to get ahead of the next likely wave of infections.

Discussion

Following the brief reports, Senate President Drummond opened the floor to questions first from senators and then from faculty guests. There was lively discussion covering many varied (and opposing) viewpoints. (Please note that these minutes do not attempt to cover every point made during the course of the special meeting.)

In response to criticism about the way faculty requests for exemptions had been treated, President Tetlow noted that initially HR had sent out the old forms, but that has now been corrected. She also said she would discuss with HR the need to treat with confidentiality those seeking exemptions in order to take the monkey pox vaccine (which cannot be taken together with the bivalent booster). In response to a request to have more regular and open communications about the schedule for replacing filtration systems, VP Valero said that can be done.

In response to the suggestion that the mandate was a bad faith attempt to manipulate faculty into taking the bivalent booster because more exemptions can be granted, President Tetlow emphasized that the university is desperately serious about the mandate.

One senator asked about how the decision to institute the mandate was made. The Provost outlined a process going back to April 2022 when there was talk of a new bivalent vaccine, through the summer (when there was lack of clarity about the booster) and ultimately in the September/October time frame when the President's cabinet needed to make a decision about the risks and benefits of sustaining the policy on being fully vaccinated. Both the Provost and the President reiterated that the authority of the CDC guidelines was crucial in the decision, all the more so since our community is divided over the issue, as shown by the recent dueling petitions against and in support of the mandate.

One senator noted that the university's position on the mandate should also be understood within the context of the university's mission, and, also as a matter of public health, that this could be part of the administration's communication to the community about its decision. This same senator also asked about the decision-making process, wondering if there was any reason not to reinstitute the mask mandate.

One senator had prepared a presentation to inform people of what they considered the relevant science. Noting their own credentials as someone who has worked on the immune regulation of viruses, this senator presented data and references to various studies that cast doubt on the claims that have been made for the efficacy of the booster. The presentation also raised concerns about the potential risks associated with the booster.

Following this detailed and lengthy presentation, Senate President Drummond invited Dr. Magari to respond. Acknowledging that there were a great many valid scientific points in the presentation, and saying that she would like to look more closely at some of the studies cited, she took issue with some of the claims in the senator's presentation. Commenting on the data presented on rates of infection in New York, she noted it was important to recognize we have lost visibility on infection since we don't have the same kind of testing we did before; she added that hospital utilization is now a critical metric to consider. She also reiterated that there was good data showing the efficacy of the vaccine, recent data indicating its effectiveness in reducing infection, and strong evidence to suggest that the booster will offer good protection against serious illness, hospitalization, and death.

Senate President Drummond opened the floor to questions from visiting faculty guests. These questions returned to some of the points already raised: concern about the data on the booster's efficacy; concern that the mandate was an extraordinarily coercive measure and that Fordham was an exception amongst New York schools; debates about the [CDC recommendations](#). Individual faculty also spoke of personal issues: one faculty member said they had repeatedly tried and failed to get an exemption on religious grounds; another faculty member shared that they had been hospitalized following a serious allergic reaction to the booster shot.

At 6:11 pm Senate President Drummond steered the discussion to questions about upcoming changes in policy, inviting the Provost to address the issue of how decisions will be made in the future.

The Provost committed to having more conversations like the one at this special meeting before the next change in policy. President Tetlow, too, said that the Senate would be consulted. Asked by Senate President Drummond what the conditions might be to decide to lift the vaccine mandate, President Tetlow noted that it was impossible to say with certainty.

Following further discussion, Senate President Drummond adjourned the meeting at 6:31 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Christopher GoGwilt, Secretary