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UVI Projects Millions in Lost Revenue Following Vaccine Mandate as More Than Half of Students Choose Online Courses

Education / **Published On August 24, 2021 05:32 AM /**

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University of the Virgin Islands Dorm Rooms on the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix. By. VI CONSORTIUM

The conversation surrounding the University of Virgin Islands' decision to mandate Covid-19 vaccination for students and employees continued on the Senate floor Monday, as lawmakers sought to learn how the mandate would impact the university financially.

University officials said 89 percent of staff was vaccinated, while the university expects a drop in enrollment of 7 percent overall. Even so, only 44 percent of the student population was vaccinated as of Monday, meaning a majority of the university's students are taking their courses online, and some have complained that the online offering is missing important courses.

It was also not clear whether the students taking online classes were enrolled in five courses, the typical amount for students. UVI President David Hall told the Consortium during a recent interview that such data had not yet been collected.

Senator Marvin Blyden asked Mr. Hall what impact the low vaccination rate among students would have on the revenues of the school. Mr. Hall stated, "The student number will definitely have an impact on revenue because number one, we will not have as many students living on campus as we would normally have... There will be a drop in revenue from residence hall and accounting. Same with food service because if you don't have as many students living on campus, then you won't have as many meal plans. Also, when we have a drop in students on campus, that means that many of the auxiliaries like the bookstore, for example, will not generate as much revenue."

Mr. Hall said [the recent announcement](#) to forgive student debt and provide more financial support to students, including free on-campus accommodation for one year, would hopefully result in more students getting vaccinated against Covid-19 and returning to campus. He said it's "a way to get some of those students who have decided not to comply to rethink their decisions."

He added, "We will also continue to promote the benefits of them being vaccinated so that more of them will come into compliance and thus more of them will take advantage of what we have to offer on the campus."

Senator Samuel Carrion asked Mr. Hall about the projected financial impact to the institution. Mr. Hall stated, "We are looking at a 7 percent drop of student enrollment overall," reiterating that adverse impacts will be felt in areas tied to student consumption.

Shirley Lake-King, UVI chief financial officer and vice president of administration and finance, said the current projection for tuition and fees is \$12 million. However, "If the numbers with respect to student compliance holds at 44 percent... that revenue picture may fall as low as \$6 million," she said.

Ms. Lake-King said the drop to \$6 million would be the "floor on that impact," and that "on the other hand in respect to auxiliaries we project about a half million dollar loss."

Mr. Carrion sought to learn whether these losses would potentially lead to the university having to furlough or layoff employees. Mr. Hall responded, "No, I do not, senator." The reason for Mr. Hall's optimism is the availability of Covid-19 funding. "One of the ways that we can utilize the Covid funding, both under the CARES Act and under the American Rescue Act is to supplement our budget when there is a loss that is directly related to Covid-19. And I think what we are expecting here is very much related to Covid-19 so those funds should help us bridge the gap in regards to those losses."

Mr. Blyden said he heard that some of the online courses do not have a teacher assigned to them, along with additional issues. Mr. Hall said he did not know of any remote course "where there is not a faculty assigned."

He added, "The problem that I think that some students that have chosen not to comply [with the vaccination mandate] are facing is that there are probably some courses that they would like to take that are not remote, but that is a choice that they made by not complying with the requirement."

He said students typically take five courses a semester. "To think out of the 250 some courses there's not five that a student would want to take is kind of hard to imagine," Mr. Hall said. "Are

there times when there are going to be issues and the particular course that a student wants, that course is not available? Sure.”

He said staff at UVI were "working very hard to try and accommodate those students who have decided not to comply with the [mandatory vaccination] requirement.”

Senator Dwayne Degraff made known that he was against the board’s decision to mandate Covid-19 vaccination.

Senator Kurt Vialet said Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine [full approval from Food and Drug Administration](#) on Monday “will change the game.”

"It is not in isolation that UVI made the decision," Mr. Vialet said, speaking of the institution's decision to mandate vaccination against Covid-19. "This is a trend that is taking place across the nation...it is not a discussion that is isolated to the Virgin Islands.”

Senator Novelle Francis [spoke of the four Covid-related deaths](#) announced by the V.I. Dept. of Health Monday, carrying the territory's total to 49. "This thing is serious, people," he said.

Senator Kenneth Gittens hoped “that we can come to some sort of happy medium where no one will get fired and no one will be deprived of being able to actually sit in the classroom to further their education.”

In his closing statement, Mr. Hall asked the Legislature “to stand with us because at the heart of the board’s decision is a concern for the people of the territory, and the science is that vaccination is the best protectant.”