

**Date:** 10/08/21

**To:** Students' Union Council

**Re:** President's Report 10/08/21

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Dear Council,

I am on vacation the week of the 10th, so I won't be in Council for questions. Please feel free to email me if there's anything you want to know before I leave on Monday!

We have been working on quite a few projects recently, but in this report I want to focus on one. As September and Week of Welcome approaches, the Exec is spending a lot of time thinking about what the best possible return to campus looks like. We believe most students are sick of online classes, and we also believe that with high vaccination rates students should be allowed to use their own discretion to determine what kind of social events they are comfortable with. However, there are a large number of students who still feel unsafe on campus, as evidenced by Dr. Jillian Buriak's [open letter](#) in support of stronger health measures.

We believe students who are at risk, or live with at risk family members, deserve to be able to attend class without being subjected to unnecessary risk. The Exec supports a cautious and deliberate approach to reopening that maximizes freedom to socialize and enjoy campus life, but allows those who still feel unsafe to be protected.

We are exploring a variety of advocacy opportunities to encourage a safe return to campus. After lengthy discussions with the executive team, specific measures we want to encourage the University to adopt include the following:

- Mandatory vaccines for students living in residence (with health exemptions). Residence is a high-risk environment for transmission of viruses, and many major Canadian and US universities have mandatory vaccination to live in theirs,
- Mask mandates for spaces students cannot opt out of being in, including lecture halls and labs,
- Availability of rapid testing on campus, and tracing managed by the University
- Wastewater testing,
- Various other measures.

We also believe it is important to positively encourage vaccination-- both carrots and sticks have a role to play in ensuring a safe return to class. We are supporting the University's return to campus vaccination campaign and are working ourselves on

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**Rowan Ley, President**

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some measures to encourage vaccination which we will be able to discuss more the week after next.

My last comment is that I think the campus community is running out of sympathy for those who refuse, or cannot be bothered, to be vaccinated. We don't know what will happen this fall-- quite likely everything will be fine. But the risk of a catastrophic outbreak caused by those who have no legitimate reason to refuse vaccination and yet do still worries me.

Many out there have commented that in a free society there should be no consequences to refusing a vaccine. I believe that is a deep misunderstanding of what freedom means. Freedom is not being able to do whatever you want with no consequences-- it is being free to make decisions, but also accepting the consequences of those decisions. Freedom without responsibility is not a luxury adults should get. At this point, I believe refusing vaccination without a legitimate medical exemption is wilful endangerment of the lives of others. It is socially irresponsible and should be sanctioned.

We are also conscious of a separate but equally urgent issue. International students who are unable to travel to Canada due to border restrictions are likely to miss weeks of classes, leading to academic penalties. We are in contact with the Provost's office to see academic accommodations made for those students.

The Executive has also been working to raise awareness in the public of ensuring a safe return to campus. Here is some of our media from the last week:

- [Me on CTV News on vaccine mandates](#)
- [Abner discussing the mix of distance and face-to-face learning](#)

A safe return to campus will be an ongoing conversation. We hope you can all be a part of the discussion.

Sincerely,



University of Alberta Students' Union President  
**Rowan Ley**