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Yet Another Request for Pro-Choice Masking

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It's now been three weeks with the updated masking requirements on campus, but practically speaking, not a whole lot seems to have changed. Masks are still required in all classes, indoor events, dining halls, coffee shops, and healthcare facilities. Sure, masks are now optional in the library, residence halls, club meetings, the gym, and Crozier-Williams, but those are all places where students frequently went maskless prior to the policy update as they were not really enforced. While transitioning into pro-choice masking at select locations on campus was better than no mask update, many students wondered when they could finally attend a class maskless for the first time since March of 2020.

This past weekend, Connecticut College's COVID Academic Continuity Group finally responded, and laid out their overdue plan to transform to pro-choice masking in class rooms. Faculty may choose to poll the class on whether to make masking optional in the classroom. The kicker is that it takes just a singular student veto to keep mandatory masking. It is peculiar that Connecticut College opted for a minority-rule system, where one student can force an entire class to mask up, even though that student maintains the right to wear a mask if they so choose.

Regardless, mask mandates in classrooms have well overstayed their usefulness. Vaccines have been available to the public for over a year now, and nearly every student on campus is not only double-vaccinated, but boosted as well, reducing covid death risk by 20-fold. Many students have even already contracted COVID—and some even more than once—offering additional protection. We now have as much protection against COVID as we can get.

For those who do not support masking forever, but support mask mandates now, at which future point will the transition happen? When COVID cases reach zero? Most experts believe that COVID will continue to be around for some time, not unlike the common cold and the flu, so zero cases is an unrealistic target. Maybe when COVID deaths reach zero? Well, that is already the case here in New London, where the seven-day average for deaths is zero.

To those jumping to retort that pro-choice masking policies are essentially experiments in human sacrifice, masking mandates may not have been as effective at suppressing COVID transmission as we first thought. A review of scientific literature on mask effectiveness from the Cato Institute reported two studies—one studying surgical masks and another studying cloth masks—which found that masks failed to significantly reduce transmission for either type.

Benjamin Franklin once quipped, “Guests, like fish, begin to smell after three days.” The once necessary, now gratuitous masks are these fish; having served its purpose and become dispensable. Mask mandates on campus are seldom replicated elsewhere in the New London community. 85% of K-12 school districts in Connecticut have been pro-choice on masks for two month now. The state's top public university, the University of Connecticut, is one of many

higher education institutions in Connecticut to have shifted to pro-choice classroom settings. If a student wishes to wear a mask, they should be able to make that decision for themselves and for it to be respected by others, but that sentiment must be replicated to students who choose to not wear a mask.