



# The Daily Free Press

The Independent Student Newspaper at Boston University

 MENU



**CAMPUS, CORONAVIRUS, NEWS**

## BU community holds multimodal protest against campus reopening plan

August 13, 2020 9:36 pm

by Angela Yang

Cars, pedestrians and bikers took to Commonwealth Avenue Thursday afternoon to rally against Boston University's reopening plan. Those who weren't present in person tuned into the multimodal event via Zoom.

Raising slogans on handmade signs, protesters stood in physically distanced groups facing the street at various locations along its public sidewalks. Written in chalk on the campus cobblestone were words and arrows encouraging ralliers to keep their distance from one another.

All speeches during the protest were delivered virtually through a Zoom webinar, which gathered more than 200 attendees. On-screen interpreter Joan Wattman live-translated to American Sign Language as each panelist spoke.

Michelle Walsh, a lecturer at BU's School of Social Work, opened the online speeches by calling on the University to "be



*A demonstrator raises their fist as they drive through the Boston University campus. Cyclists, pedestrians and drivers participated in Thursday's Protest From Anywhere urging the University to allow staff to work from home, provide free personal protective equipment and give free testing to local residents. LAURYN ALLEN/ DAILY FREE PRESS STAFF*

better and do better” in its commitment toward social justice.

Various unions representing campus personnel have explicitly asked to meet with BU President Robert Brown, but have not received a response, Walsh said. Her speech centered around the University’s lack of engagement in transparent negotiations with these unions.

“If Boston University is truly committed to what it proclaims, then listening to and acting upon the recommendations of its most directly impacted personnel is a moral mandate,” Walsh said. “We can help you to find a moral center in this, so that those who are already the most marginalized among us do not carry the bulk of the weight of shared sacrifice about which you speak, President Brown.”

The Campus Health is Community Health campaign highlighted three primary demands for BU: de-densifying campus by maximizing remote work, providing personal protective equipment to all on campus and offering free COVID-19 testing to surrounding community members who must live in proximity to its students.

But graduate student Zachary Bos added two additional requests during his speech. He asked that BU grant hazard pay to all employees who must work in person as well as rehire all staff who were laid off due to recent budget cuts.

“My union members have been fired, furloughed and laid off,” said Bos, who serves on the executive board of Union Auto Workers Local 2324. “And throughout this entire process, the students are being welcomed back to campus and asked to pay for and bring their own first-aid kits.”

City Councilor Kenzie Bok of District 8, which encompasses BU, said during the webinar that she has repeatedly asked BU and Northeastern University to rethink their in-person reopening plans and opt for a virtual-learning model.

The councilor had also sent a [letter](#) to Brown and NEU President Joseph Aoun on Aug. 3 requesting this.

Bok said the decision by the schools to forge ahead with hybrid models is a “wrong” and “foolhardy” one, as she does not wish to see a new spike in COVID-19 cases that would force the city into another full shutdown.

While the University will enforce frequent testing for BU community members who return to campus, Bok said this free service should also extend to neighboring residents.

“It’s great that we have... the lab capacity to build this kind of testing,” Bok said during the webinar, “but I think we need that capacity as a public resource that’s shared.”

BU spokesperson Colin Riley wrote in an email after the event that the University continues to make its reopening decisions with meticulous consideration and regularly updates its Back2BU website with new and relevant information.

“The University has put a lot of careful thought, extraordinary effort and thorough planning in place for the fall,” Riley wrote.

“We are confident in the plans we have made, and look forward to implementing them along with faculty, staff and students

this fall.”

Rachel McCleery, internal organizer at Service Employees International Union Local 509, was an organizer of the protest. She said the idea for the rally came about less than two weeks ago.

McCleery described the planning process as triple the amount of work a typical protest would require, as the organizers had to make preparations for cars as well as both in-person and virtual attendees to congregate in unison.

“We felt that it was worth the extra work to make sure people had a choice and felt safe in whatever they chose to do,” McCleery said in an interview. “We wish that BU would do the same.”

McCleery said she believes a remote semester is feasible now that instructors have developed some experience teaching virtually from the shift that occurred in Spring when the pandemic began.

“[They] found out what worked and what didn’t,” McCleery said, “and figured out how to design a really good class.”

Graduate student Devlin Moyer attended the protest despite not being heavily impacted by BU’s reopening. The University does not pay him to teach, meaning he can choose to learn remotely without fear of [losing a stipend](#).

Moyer said he participated, however, to support those who are afraid of “retaliation for being concerned about their working conditions.” Moyer said more transparency in decision-making is one change he hopes to see.

“People have been complaining about that for a long time,” Moyer said, “and BU has been doing nothing to even seem more transparent. And that’s frustrating.”



**Author: Angela Yang**

## 2 Comments



**Student**

August 14, 2020 at 4:39 pm

Thank you to all the organizers! I’m part of a graduate program at BU that has been requiring me to attend lecture in person

every day for the past month. Sometimes we are over capacity and have to sit in rooms not big enough for social distancing, and sometimes my lecturers don't wear masks or wear them incorrectly. While I appreciate the administrations efforts into getting us back to education as usual, it doesn't seem like there's any real reason why my lectures can't be done over zoom.



**Konrad**

August 15, 2020 at 6:38 pm

Let's face it, BU is absolutely not prepared for opening in a few weeks. Our facilities are not ready for pandemics, faculty are justifiably afraid (if you dealt with this incompetent administration for years, how can you trust it). There are quasi fixes visible everywhere, masking years of incompetent management and poor planning. From parking fiascos at BUMC, poor sanitation, poor ventilation to limited PPE. Good luck to us all. I would not count on any help or compassion from the leadership, as the only thing they are interested in now is escalation of commitment and profits to justify their existence.

*What would you like to see The Daily Free Press cover? Let us know on our [tip line](#).*

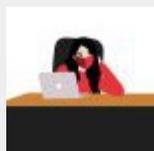
## LATEST OPINION



OP-ED: American democracy isn't on the brink of collapse — it doesn't exist



2021 Breakdown: Actions must have consequences, especially for those at the top



Final Word: A letter from the editor