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Around 10am, Fri Aug 14:

Here's why BU plans not to notify faculty when students test positive for COVID-19

August 13, 2020 11:15 pm by [Chloe Liu](#)

NOTICE: We published this article Thursday evening. We removed it temporarily to confirm more sources before publishing.

The version that was posted prior to article being removed:

Here's why BU plans not to notify faculty when students test positive for COVID-19

August 13, 2020 11:15 pm by [Chloe Liu](#)

Classroom instructors will not be informed when a student in one of their classes tests positive for COVID-19, President Robert Brown announced in a Faculty Council meeting Tuesday.

Boston University administrators brought up this policy in response to questions about contact tracing procedures, which were heavily discussed among faculty, according to a member of the Faculty Council who asked to remain anonymous.

During the meeting, Brown and his team answered questions from the council members and discussed issues such as classroom ventilation, mask-wearing and threshold plans.

The source said Brown compared a classroom to a grocery store, questioning whether one should be notified if someone at a grocery store they visit has tested positive.

Judy Platt, director of Student Health Services, said during the meeting that because classrooms will be de-densified and students should be six feet apart, their possibility or chance of encountering an infectious contact is effectively zero.

This was the initial justification given by the University regarding why a faculty member would not need to know if a student of theirs tested positive for COVID-19. The U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act was briefly mentioned during the meeting, but was not heavily addressed by Brown or the team, the source said.

HIPAA ensures patient privacy, meaning that individual names of students who test positive will not be revealed to instructors. Under current policies, however, instructors would not receive any notification that a student from their class tested positive.

During another Faculty Council meeting Thursday, Provost Jean Morrison said it could be possible to discover a way to notify faculty without violating HIPAA, according to the source.

Colin Riley, the University's spokesperson, wrote in an email that BU will enforce a contact tracing program in which close contacts of those who test positive will be tracked.

Riley wrote that BU is currently working with health experts to do what's best for the University. Per public health protocols, faculty would only be notified if they are considered close contacts.

However, Riley wrote the decision is not yet definitive.

"BU has not reached a final decision on whether they will notify faculty regardless or only when they are considered close contacts," Riley wrote. "President Brown said that this was still under consideration during the Faculty Council meeting."

While Thursday's meeting suggested a potential re-approach, the anonymous Faculty Council source said that on Tuesday, Brown was "very clear" about not notifying faculty if their students test positive.

"There was no ambiguity," the source said. "[Brown's] position was there is no need to know, period. There was no 'we're going to rethink this.'"

Conversations during the Faculty Council meeting also covered the University's current mask policy, which, according to the source, is still under review. Faculty conversed about the effectiveness of cloth masks as compared to surgical masks.

"[Brown] stepped in and said, 'I think this is a very important point that you're making, and I think that we need to consider this policy on what a minimum standard is for a mask,'" the source said. "I mean, the testing is very important, but the frontline is really wearing a mask and wearing a mask that's effective."

The University has been "very open to answering questions from Faculty Council members," the source said.

"In a lot of faculty discussions, there's been a lot of criticism of the administration for not having answers to questions," the source said. "But at the same time, I think we have to appreciate that everything is moving so quickly."

The administration has also created many previously unscheduled meetings, the source said, to provide council members more opportunities to ask questions.

But the University hasn't yet addressed all the concerns that have been put forward by faculty and staff. The [open letter](#) written by two associate professors in BU's Philosophy Department, the source said, has not received a response.

Associate Professor Daniel Star, one of the letter's authors, has been vocal about the University's plans for reopening from the start. He started a blog to address faculty concerns, entitled "With All Due Caution."

Star said new scientific evidence is showing that a six-foot distance between people isn't enough indoors anymore, especially in poorly ventilated spaces.

"I think the University needs to revise its contact-tracing policy in line with the most recent scientific evidence," Star said. "There's a growing consensus on this."

Star said that with less than three weeks until classes start, he believes the University most likely will not turn toward a fully remote model as of now. He said the immediate focus for the administration should be to make the learning environment as safe as possible for those who are on campus.

"I think that there's still a serious risk of BU transitioning to online during the semester because of high infection numbers," Star said. "But if the University wants to lower that risk, it should be doing many things."

Star proposed several ideas publicly outside the meeting that he believes will further protect the campus from coronavirus spread, such as providing instructors with devices to test carbon dioxide levels in classrooms.

Joseph Rezek, an associate English professor, wrote in an email that the length at which some classes run — up to three hours — in potentially inadequately ventilated buildings, is worrying.

"Obviously never violate anyone's privacy," Rezek wrote. "But instructors at BU aren't being given a choice about teaching in person (only exemptions by petition), and they deserve to know if someone they share a classroom with is positive."

While Rezek himself will not be teaching in the Fall, he expressed his concern on social media for "the community spread at BU and in the Boston area." He wrote he believes BU should go remote this semester while accepting unique exceptions.

Correction: A previous version of this article misstated Daniel Star said 6 feet of distance isn't enough outdoors. He said it is not enough indoors.



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