

16 August 2021

Dear President Dawson, Interim Provost Lindquist, Dean Lane, and Department Chair Jones:

In previous correspondence I sketched some concerns I have about the adequacy of our university's COVID-19 safety plan. This being our final opportunity to modify that plan before classes begin, I would like to take the opportunity to more fully articulate these concerns.

A professor who regularly smokes cigarettes in class would be reprimanded and eventually fired for endangering the public health. But as COVID-19 hospitalizations surge in Alabama, classrooms packed tightly with scores of unvaccinated students wearing cheap, ill-fitting masks strike me as a far greater and more urgent danger to the public health than secondhand smoke. Unfortunately, however, not only are such gatherings permitted at UAH, but professors who refuse on public health grounds to convene them are themselves subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Perhaps due to the political nature of this crisis—in a state that prohibits public university vaccine mandates and insists that both public and private institutions shall remain “open for business”—some faculty, staff, and administrators are looking the other way, holding their tongues, holding their noses, or holding their breath in fear as they prepare to convene or attend in-person gatherings on campus. Junior colleagues have also expressed to me their fears of retaliation if they register even the most modest forms of protest. Senior colleagues, meanwhile, have reached out to assure me, sometimes with a demoralized or cynical air, that little can be done about our contribution to Alabama's impending public health crisis. It seems that only when we reach a political, as well as a public health, crisis will our university move most or all classes safely online.

But this is a *moral* emergency, not a time for craven and timorous—or self-serving—responses. Our situation should be regarded alongside not only the 1918 Flu, but the Tuskegee Study. We know what it takes to protect community health and very likely save lives, and we have the ability to do it; what is lacking is the collective willingness to do so. And I find myself compelled to consider whether my continued relationship with UAH might render me complicit in a moral atrocity.

Therefore, I have decided to resign my position as associate professor of philosophy, effective immediately.

Sincerely,  
Jeremy Fischer

Formerly Associate Professor of Philosophy  
University of Alabama in Huntsville  
<https://www.jeremyfischer.org/>

Jeremy.M.Fischer.01@gmail.com

CC:

Chancellor Finis St. John IV

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