Do Students Want Vaccine Mandates?

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Executive Summary

- We surveyed 4,812 students in 78 countries who attend over 1,000 unique post-secondary institutions.

- On average, students are relatively happy with existing university policies.

- Students who are unsure of their class formats going forward are more likely to report being unhappy with their administration's approaches.

- 85.2% of vaccinated students globally support vaccine mandates at universities.

- Opposition to vaccine mandates is almost entirely by unvaccinated students.
Governments, universities, and students are confronting challenges associated with a return to in-person classes for the 2021 academic year. Thus far, the debate on a safe return to classes has either focused on government, in relation to ongoing political conversations already occurring, or at the university-level, between university staff, faculty, and administration; surprisingly little attention has been paid to what students prefer when they return to school.

An evolving area of policy change at the post-secondary level relates to vaccine mandates. In Canada, some universities have decided to mandate vaccinations after indicating that they would not mandate vaccines, some schools are relying on an ‘honour system’ approach, while other institutions are opting to merely follow sub-national governmental policy. Globally, the response to vaccine mandates is even more diverse. What is even less clear, is what students favour; do students want their schools to implement vaccine mandates?

For the purposes of better informing governments and university administrations, we have administered a global study of students from 65+ countries across hundreds of universities aimed at (1) surveying opinions on existing measures and policies, (2) investigating student attitudes towards vaccines and vaccine availability, and (3) examining relationships between vaccine status and vaccine mandates. We mostly report results by continent in comparison with our Canadian sample.
To better understand the preferences of post-secondary students, we surveyed **4,812 students** in **78 countries** who attend **over 1,000 unique post-secondary institutions** between July 28 and August 27, 2021. We fielded this survey on the Qualtrics survey platform using targeted social media advertising to acquire a convenience sample.

We administered the survey in English, French, Spanish, Korean, and Portuguese, and oriented the sampling towards countries where at least one of these languages is dominant.

The survey sample has not been weighted, but we report our demographic variables; considering the breadth of the sample, and the relatively large sample size, we are confident that this sample adequately reflects the diversity of the global student population. We acknowledge that a survey of this breadth may not accurately indicate country or region-level with great accuracy.

The following map displays the number of student respondents from each country.
Firstly, we have chosen to ask students “How happy are you with the way your school is handling the COVID-19 pandemic?” We intend to better understand if students are happy with their institution’s existing policies in general (including communications, return to class policies, and on-campus rules to ensure safety).

Figure 1 indicates that, on average, students are relatively happy with existing policies. 49% of the surveyed students are either somewhat or extremely happy with the way their school is handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Students in Europe, who are currently experiencing some of the most stringent COVID-19 mitigation efforts, seem happiest overall. Canadian respondents are, on average, happier than not (55% are either somewhat or extremely happy with their school). Respondents from Asia are least happiest, which may reflect uneven COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Our expectation is that unhappiness is related to uncertainty about the future of their institutions’ chosen policies and expectations about class format. To test this theory, we asked students if they are aware of how their classes will proceed upon a return to school.
Figure 2 presents self-reported class formats for the upcoming academic year. The answers are strikingly even: no single format seems more prevalent than another. Importantly, 18.5% of respondents do not know how their classes will proceed; this situation is concerning since students responded to this survey mere weeks before returning to school. Furthermore, we expect that uncertainty is related to unhappiness; in Figure 3, we examine the relationship between happiness and expected class format.
Students who are unsure of their class formats ("don't know") going forward are indeed more likely to report being unhappy with their administration's approaches (only 35.9% are either somewhat or extremely happy). As part of a COVID-19 mitigation plan, universities should be mindful that miscommunications, regarding class format or other university-level policies, might have negative repercussions for students. Universities should strive to set clear requirements early, including their intended approach regarding vaccine mandates.

We know that vaccines are mostly going to citizens in the Global North. Indeed, there is substantial criticism by world health experts that Global South countries are being adequately supplied with vaccines. What is less clear, perhaps, but important given the global nature of post-secondary education, is to what extent students have been able to receive vaccines globally. Using our sample of 4,812 students, we have mapped vaccine rates by country in the following map (Figure 4).
As expected, students in the Global North are more likely to have received a vaccine than students in the Global South. Of particular interest is Australia, in which many students have been unable to receive a vaccine, and Africa, where countries have had procurement challenges related to, in part, excessive demand by countries in the Global North.

Vaccination is the top priority of the majority of countries to mitigate the effect of COVID-19. Universities around the world have chosen to implement vaccine mandates for faculty, staff and students; In Canada, some universities have decided to mandate vaccinations after indicating that they would not mandate vaccines, some schools are relying on an ‘honour system’ approach, while other institutions are opting to merely follow sub-national governmental policy.

Keeping in mind that some students have not had access to vaccines yet, particularly in Global South, how popular are vaccine mandates for university students globally? Figure 5 presents university vaccine mandate popularity by continent against Canadian Respondents.
In Canada, vaccine mandates are overwhelmingly popular; 69.7% of students in Canada support mandatory vaccines for students in order to return to in-person classes. In North and South America, as well as Asia, support is even stronger.

In Europe and Africa, we see slightly lower levels of support. Due to the relatively broad sample size, which included many countries in Africa and Eastern Europe that have been unable to secure vaccines, these levels of support may reflect anxiety about vaccine availability before classes start.

Finally, in Oceania, where vaccines have been largely unavailable for students due to their age and vaccine supply, only 42.9% of students support vaccine mandates because they are worried that they will be unable to receive vaccinations before classes start.

These regional trends may also be contingent on vaccination status as well. Hence, we ask: how popular are vaccine mandates when vaccine status is considered? Figure 6 displays vaccine mandate support by status.
Do you think that students should have to be fully vaccinated (2-doses) in order to return to in-person classes?

Figure 6: Vaccine Mandates by Inoculation Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Vaccinated Students</th>
<th>Unvaccinated Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>51.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In Canada, opposition to vaccine mandates is almost only notable among unvaccinated students. Over 80% of vaccinated student respondents support vaccine mandates in contrast to only ~15% of unvaccinated respondents. This trend is also observed, to a slightly greater extent in the United States; only 12.5% of unvaccinated students in the United States support vaccine mandates.

In South American countries and Mexico, we see higher levels of support among unvaccinated students than in Canada and the United States. Similarly, in Asia, students who are unvaccinated are still overwhelmingly (78.6%) in favour of vaccine mandates.

We see low levels of support among unvaccinated people in Oceania for vaccine mandates, which may be due to a lack of vaccine availability or the timing in which our survey was taken, in which Australia and New Zealand experienced virtually no cases of COVID-19. Likewise, in Europe, support is relatively even among unvaccinated students, which may change over time, as more European students are able to access vaccines; we likewise expect support among students in Africa to change over time in the same manner.

In the global dataset, unvaccinated students are relatively (~60.5%) in favour of vaccine mandates; support among vaccinated respondents is extremely high (85.2%); we expect these statistics to shift over time as more students globally are able to access vaccines. Canada, where vaccines are easily accessible, may foreshadow what is to come globally.

Education-sector policymakers should consider where vaccine mandate opposition is coming from. In our data, clearly, it is unvaccinated students who are opposed to vaccine mandates; whether students are willingly unvaccinated or unable to receive a vaccine yet due to supply challenges, varies by region.
PEARL (Policy, Elections, and Representation Lab) is a research lab directed by Professor Peter Loewen. The Lab is interested in four big questions: How do individuals make decisions about politics? How do politicians make policy and represent citizens? How is technology changing governance and politics? How is COVID-19 shaping political behaviour and citizen behaviour more broadly?