ACT-Up Style “DIE IN” at UVA in #Charlottesville Today

Schools around the country are bringing students back to campus despite Covid-19 concerns. In Charlottesville, it’s not going over well.

September 2, 2020 By Shawn Decker

Today a “die in” was held on UVA’s campus to protest the school’s insistence on bringing students back to campus despite health concerns. Just over the mountain, about an hour away, James Madison University has already touched the hot stove without a mitten. After hundreds of students tested positive, the university is now sending all students back home… a move that Dr. Fauci says is the wrong way to handle it, because you’re just amplifying exposure to COVID-19.

ACT-UP made the die in famous decades ago, as a way of protesting President Reagan’s cruel response to the AIDS epidemic. In a society where visuals are so effective (just ask advertisers and nude models), the image of multiple bodies strewn about gives even the most jaded and casual bystander pause.

The next wave of infections in the United States will certainly be attributed to the beginning of the school year. There’s just no getting around it, especially where college students are concerned. You simply can’t expect thousands of young people to socially isolate on campus. I just think back to half my life ago. I had about a 150 t-cells and extreme fatigue… but at age 21, I jumped at the chance to move to NYC.

I lasted a little over a month.

That’s why it’s important that the people in positions of power, in our government and in institutions such as colleges and universities, make the right decisions where the health of the public is concerned. But that’s not what’s happening. The truth, in my opinion, is that in a capitalist society profit margins are more important than people. I never thought I’d live to see the day where the entire country is treated the same way that people with bleeding disorders were treated by blood companies in the 1980s. It’s a tragedy that is hard to put into words.

Making matters worse, the decisions being made by UVA resembles the COVID fatigue that many are feeling. The isolation and disruptions to peoples’ lives are causing more folks to take more chances. For instance, last week I listened with a fair amount of horror as my mom told me she was going to be playing the organ at church. It’s something she’s done on and off for as long as I

remember. She turns 70 this week, and I already worry about how long my parents will be around while realizing how lucky I am to still have them. I just don't want this to be her last birthday, but I also know that objections fall on deaf ears when people feel like they are being safe.

I know the dynamic I'm experiencing in my family isn't a unique experience. And the worst is yet to come... Thanksgiving is going to be a tragedy for the ages, and many families will be spending Christmas praying for loved ones as they fight for their lives in the hospital.

So, needless to say, I support the Die In that happened in Charlottesville today, organized by the UVA's Student Union and faculty. You know, the non-decision makers who risk their lives by being on campus. I'm proud to call this town my home, and it's nice to see some old-school AIDS activism being used to fight the pandemic of the day. Hope this finds you and yours well.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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