

December 14, 2020

College – End of Fall Term 2020

Your blogger is a proud alumnus of The University of Michigan. His education at U of M opened doors through his life. “The Leaders and Best ...” goes *The Victors*, the school fight song. What the hell happened to U of M this Fall, and YB is not talking about the football team (that’s another blog posting)?

Given a chance to do some real leadership in the academic world, President Mark Schlissel and his leadership team fumbled, stumbled, muffed, and dug themselves into a hole from which it could take years to emerge. Given the opportunity to put together a first-class effort in running a University under the cloud of COVID-19, The University of Michigan became a second-class s**t-show. So did its rival Michigan State.

The [New York Times](#) (December 12) reported that Ingham County, the home of Michigan State

“... went from having about 300 new infections in August to about 1,800 in September. On Sept. 14, health officials said a majority of the newest cases involved students at Michigan State and ordered people in many fraternities and sororities to quarantine. Virus deaths have more than tripled in the county since the end of August, to 141 from 41.”

Both Michigan and Michigan State sent most of their students home and they will be almost entirely online for Winter 2021. Finally, they did the right thing.

This is a health economics blog. Michigan and Michigan State both have Physician-Presidents. Surely Presidents Schlissel and Stanley understood infectious diseases and the external effects that they have on others. Surely Presidents Schlissel and Stanley understood how 18 to 22-year-old students act in social and group situations, interacting with and infecting others. Although they are both “state institutions”, both (especially Michigan) have healthy endowments that could cushion financial shock.

Was it hubris? Did these institutions think that they could undo science? Neither had the kind of testing and tracing programs that could have cut down the spread of the virus?

Was it sports? The Big Ten made the right decision (canceling) and then made the wrong decision (re-starting). They stood to lose a lot of money by not playing. They lost a lot more respect by trying to play and having whole teams infected, games canceled, and reputations shot. All so Ohio State could play for a national championship.

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The Ivy League canceled their whole fall and winter seasons, and is “postponing” spring sports until at least the end of February 2021. The Michigan schools love to compete with the Ivy League as scholars, and they compete well in many fields. They have fallen woefully short, in judgment with respect to COVID-19.

Universities in the United States will come back after the New Year’s break for the Winter (or “Spring” in some places) term. Maybe they will do a better job this time.

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