

August 20, 2020

Three Cheers for Michigan State

NPR.org ran the following story yesterday.

Two Midwestern universities announced on Tuesday that they will be modifying their fall plans because of the coronavirus pandemic. The University of Notre Dame is moving all undergraduate instruction online for two weeks, and Michigan State University is going fully remote for the semester.

“The virus is a formidable foe,” [Notre Dame President] Jenkins said. “For the past week, it has been winning. Let us as the Fighting Irish join together to contain it.”

<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/08/18/903707406/michigan-state-and-notre-dame-suspend-in-person-learning-over-covid-19-concerns>

If the reader will oblige, “you could see this one coming.” Notre Dame was one of the first universities to announce that they were going to reopen in the fall. In an earlier blog ([Re-opening Universities](#)) on April 27, YB questioned the plans of Brown University. In another blog ([Race to the Top](#)), YB took on Notre Dame, with an “imaginary” reopening plan. Notre Dame later announced a plan for reopening early, and closing by Thanksgiving, and apparently forbidding any parties, or allowing students ever to return home. They reopened, and it has not worked.

This is a health economics blog. COVID-19 is a form of air pollution – the more activity, the more pollution. The pollution increases with increased activity (students, crowding, parties, in short everything that happens in colleges). It decreases with prevention (masks, social distancing, cleanliness activities, and so on). Notre Dame discovered that its students had gone to (gasp!) parties. Michigan State’s discovery occurred earlier at a local watering hole, whose owners did everything they could to provide a safe space, but didn’t own the sidewalk, where everyone congregated. The COVID-19 air pollution kills people – thus far over 170,000 in the United States.

Why is Notre Dame doing this? Might one suggest ... football? Notre Dame football is legendary, and brings in a lot of money. Notre Dame wants its football, and staying open suggests that athletes are students who play football. If students are on campus, then playing football is ... OK. So far a lot of the students have come down with COVID-19.

Michigan State (and YB is a University of Michigan graduate) is more honest. They’re not playing football, and they are pretty much closing down their campus. Michigan State loves their football and its celebration, but it has not been participating in the hue and cry that followed the canceling of the Big Ten season. Coaches and athletes at Nebraska, Iowa, Ohio State, and yes, Michigan have been carrying on that they should play football because the athletes want to

August 20, 2020

play. It is safe for the athletes, they say. Tell that to the first tuba player who wants to play, but cannot. Tell that to the lab scientists who are locked out of their labs. Tell that to the dancers who can't perform.

There are lots of things in the US university system that are more important than football ... lots and lots. This one hurts, but **THREE CHEERS** for **MICHIGAN STATE**.

Allen C. Goodman
Professor of Economics