Continued COVID Struggles Frustrate, Scare University Students and Workers

By Artemis Allison

HOUGHTON, Mich. – One month after reopening fully for the fall near the start of September, both Michigan Technological University and its students are still struggling to cope and adapt to all the changes that are required in the new learning atmosphere during the coronavirus pandemic. As cases continue to rise in Houghton County, with the area now being labelled one of the highest-rising areas in the state of Michigan, the area as a whole has been under the spotlight of both state radio and Governor Whitmer, who has recently travelled up to the area to speak. During the last week of September, both Michigan Technological University and all the public schools in the area have transitioned fully to online learning for two weeks to try and slow down the rise of cases throughout the public area, but even for Michigan Tech, this action feels like only a partial attempt to some students. Krysta Indish, a fourth year student and coach at the Multiliteracies Center, said “I think that they aren't restricting enough activity to truthfully slow it down,” as well as that “the fact that gym classes and labs are still happening are downright outrageous and also, the fact that it's costing me the same amount to not even be in their facilities is theft.”

Though, at first, the Flex plan presented by Michigan Tech comforted some students, Julia Barnes, a residential assistant in Michigan Tech’s dorms and a coach at Michigan Tech’s Multiliteracies Center, says that as of late “there is so much inconsistency at this university right now that the lack of communication is my biggest problem I have with MTU’s handle of this situation” when asked about her feelings over the Multiliteracies Center’s Slack server. Much of Michigan Tech’s reports of COVID-19 rates through the student body of the university has been unclear, with the format of how the stats were reported changing frequently and making it harder to understand the daily changes of the numbers which has lead to both students and the general public feeling confused and stressed. “I think that all of the symptoms of stress are heightened when the university does not have clear communication,” Barnes also said.

Michigan Tech’s unclear decision making has left students feeling unsafe in addition to just feeling stressed. Doctor William De Herder, assistant director of the Multiliteracies Center, reported during a weekly check-in that “the coaches [of the MTMC] have generally had pretty low moral; we've had coaches with other on-campus jobs where supervisors have not been concerned with the safety of the students. I think it was the first week that I met with coaches as they were working that I had to fill out a concern report form [for a student], as she wasn't getting the help that she needs from on campus resources; another coach wrote to me in distress about her working conditions on another on-campus job.”