

In Defense of Vaccine Choice

I am a tenured professor who has been protesting the university's vaccine policy through non-compliance. Specifically, I have refused to declare my vaccine status. Why? While I recognize the health benefits of vaccination, I believe that individuals should have a right to privacy in their medical decisions, and that medical decisions should be made free from coercion.

In the hysteria surrounding Covid, my libertarian positions have become rather controversial. In fact, the University has placed me on disciplinary probation - characterizing my silence as professional misconduct. This seems a bit of a stretch to me, especially given that the majority of US institutions currently have no vaccine mandate for faculty according to the Chronicle of Higher Education. Perhaps it is the University's policy that should be described as activist.

So, why defend bodily autonomy? I fear that allowing institutions to insert themselves into the medical decisions of individuals sets a dangerous precedent. As a parent of an IVF baby, I can certainly imagine other medical decisions that the University or Catholic Church may not approve of. And what about the idea of consent? If "consent" can be coerced in a professional relationship, does that mean "coerced consent" is acceptable in personal relationships as well? These strike me as rather dangerous concepts that could set the stage for some dystopian future.

As the University moves to begin dismissal proceedings against me, it is reasonable to think about the nature of tenure and the action that the University is considering. Isn't the point of tenure to protect faculty who speak for controversial minority positions? Such speech can involve symbolic actions like burning a draft card, smoking pot on the steps of Old Main at PSU, or throwing a vaccine attestation form in the trash. If the idea of tenure is undermined, the University could become an echo chamber for mainstream viewpoints.

Perhaps health and safety concerns trump my freedom to voice dissent. Am I really such a menace to campus? This position would seem to be hard to justify as well. After all, our campus population is largely made up of healthy young adults who are overwhelmingly vaccinated.

As the politics of vaccine mandates play out nationally, it seems likely that many people will be losing their jobs due to their conservative political convictions. At what point does it become a (perhaps inadvertent) political purge?

Thanks for reading, and I welcome collegial discussion/debate on this topic. Feel free to email or stop by my office if you'd like to talk. However, I may not be able to respond once dismissal proceedings begin due to a gag order provision in the faculty handbook.

Dr. Benjamin Bishop

Computing Sciences

