

Re: Notice of refusal to submit to the UW mandatory vaccination and testing policy

Mark Giesbrecht <mwg@uwaterloo.ca>

Thu 9/30/2021 4:31 PM

To: Edward Vrscaj <ervrscaj@uwaterloo.ca>

Cc: Siv Sivaloganathan <ssivaloganathan@uwaterloo.ca>

Dear Ed,

This email is to acknowledge receipt of your email.

As you have noted correctly, you are required to be in compliance with [UW's vaccine requirement](#) and could otherwise face disciplinary action in the near future. I really do encourage you to complete your vaccination and upload your proof of vaccination by October 17. I truly believe this to be essential for community health, and important for your own. I recognize that you may have differing opinions as outlined in your letter, but the university is unwavering in its commitment to our approach, and I am fully supportive.

I must make very clear that under no circumstance can you come on to campus until you have met the vaccine requirement (October 17 or after) or participate in the rapid testing program if you come to campus before that date. I believe that Siv has kindly offered support in arranging for delivery some of your office materials if that is your wish. COVID-19 [testing, rapid screening and vaccination](#) is available through Campus Wellness for all University of Waterloo employees.

I would also suggest that broad dissemination of unsolicited emails to UW email addresses is not in your or anyone's interests, and can be disrupting and disconcerting to some.

With respect to your courses this term, it is possible that you may not be able to continue teaching after October 17, and similarly for your assigned teaching in January. Of course, this teaching is an essential part of your professorial duties. Decisions and ramifications on a breach of compliance will be decided centrally and communicated directly to you. Siv will also communicate on how this interacts with your teaching, supervision, service activities if and when that time comes.

I would suggest that you also reach out to FAUW and the [Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee](#) for advice and representation.

I do recognize that this is a difficult issue and time for everyone, and truly wish you all the best. You have made many great contributions as a professor here for many years, and I hope for many more.

Respectfully yours,

Mark

On Sep 27, 2021, at 11:24 AM, Edward Vrscaj <ervrscaj@uwaterloo.ca> wrote:

To: Mark Giesbrecht, Dean, Faculty of Mathematics, UW
Siv Sivaloganathan, Chair, Department of Applied Mathematics, UW

Cc: David McKinnon, Chair, Department of Pure Mathematics, UW
Brian Ingalls, Associate Chair, Graduate Studies, Department of Applied Mathematics, UW
Cindy Forbes, Chair, Board of Governors, UW
Vivek Goel, President, UW
James Rush, Vice President, Academic and Provost, UW
Dennis Huber, Vice President, Administration and Finance
Charmaine Dean, Vice President, Research and International
David DeVidi, Associate Vice President, Academic
Jeff Casello, Associate Vice President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs
Marilyn Thompson, Associate Provost, Human Resources
Chris Read, Associate Provost, Students
Karen Jack, University Secretary
Lori Curtis, FAUW President
Kathy Becker, UWSA President
Greg Macedo, CUPE President
Jean Becker, Interim Associate Vice President, Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion

Re: Notice of my refusal to submit to the UW mandatory vaccination and testing policy

Date: September 27, 2021

Dear Mark and Siv (with copies to David *et al.*):

I am writing to give you advance notice of my intention not to be vaccinated nor to submit myself to testing by the UW mandatory vaccination policy deadline date of October 17 or beyond. Even though this will require my absence from campus, I do not foresee any disruption in any of my academic activities during the Fall 2021 term – unless, of course, the University decides to terminate my employment during this term. In that case, I shall leave it for the University to make reparations with those directly affected, i.e., students in the courses I am currently teaching as well as my current graduate students. If I am permitted to continue, then the Winter 2022 term may be of concern - I shall address this later in this letter.

Before continuing with the more professional aspects of my situation, communicating to you as my “line managers”, I would like to make some comments of a more personal nature. After all, we are human beings and colleagues, and I have known you, Siv and Mark, for some time now - especially you, Siv, whom I have known for all the years that you have been at UW (and even beforehand, as you have often reminded me). You, Siv, have been more than a colleague - you have been a very close and dear friend. Over the years, you and I joined forces on a number of occasions to “fight the good fight” in our dedication to the “academic ethic”. I can well imagine that you, and perhaps the others, are wondering why I would take a stand which may not only cast me as a pariah among my colleagues but which may well affect my employment situation in the not-too-distant future. I shall address these questions below, if only briefly. Let me also mention that I am copying this letter to members of the senior level of UW’s administration to reaffirm my opposition to its mandatory vaccination and testing policy and to protest its treatment of those who, for valid reasons, refuse to comply. I am also copying to administrators whose portfolios are concerned with the welfare of students, staff and faculty members at UW.

Let me repeat my statement that I respect the decisions of those who have chosen to be vaccinated. I sincerely wish everyone not only good health but excellent health. That being said, I shall in no way attempt to defend my decision to refuse to abide by the policy. Indeed, if I were even to try, I would be acknowledging its validity - which I emphatically do not, since I consider the policy to be unlawful, unethical and medically unsound as discussed in my open letter with Michael Palmer (Chemistry, UW), Richard Mann (Computer Science, UW) and (originally) 29 other signatories - staff, students and parents of students (the list has grown to well over 100) - and independently in the open letter by Prof. Dan Smilek (Psychology, UW) and his three colleagues from Laurier. From the viewpoint of personal freedom to choose, the policy

violates federal and provincial law. It infringes the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, in particular Sections 2, 7 and 15. It violates the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. (Of course, I have seen the recent statement of the Ontario Human Rights Commission on vaccine mandates. What do you expect it to have written?) Although I could continue along this legalistic train of thought, I shall not do so because, in fact, my own personal decision is based on a **Higher Law**. As a Roman Catholic, I subscribe to the teaching of the Church that personal conscience - a gift from God Who created each one of us in His own image - is **sacred and inviolable and must be respected in political society**. (Of course, the notion of “personal conscience” guided by Absolute Truth is rather foreign in today’s society and even, I am sad to write, in the minds of many Catholics. What can one expect in a society led by institutions – academic, political and, yes, even religious! – that have allowed the very notion of truth to disappear? “Dicit ei Pilatus: ‘Quid est veritas?’” Joann. 18:38.)

In its “Note on the morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines”, namely those “that have been developed from cell lines derived from tissues obtained from two fetuses that were not spontaneously aborted,” the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (December 21, 2020) states that “practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary”. It continues with, “Those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses,” - a group to which I belong unequivocally - “must do their utmost to avoid, by other prophylactic means and appropriate behavior, becoming vehicles for the transmission of the infectious agent” - no problems there. (That being said, it must be understood that the Church can make authoritative pronouncements only on moral matters and not on the scientific aspects of COVID-19 and vaccines, which lie beyond its expertise and hence “jurisdiction”.) Furthermore, with regard to the “exemptions” and “accommodations” of the mandate policy, I shall quote a faculty member, friend, and fellow Catholic at St. Jerome’s University who, in writing to his administration, pointed out so aptly that since the mandatory vaccination policy is unlawful, then so is the policy of granting exemptions and accommodations: “It is nonsensical for someone to be requesting an exemption from an unlawful activity.”

As for the testing requirement - the other “escape route” - I judge it to be discriminatory in light of recent results which show that vaccinated people can become infected as often as unvaccinated people. This would seem to imply that the former can transmit the disease as effectively as the latter -- see, for example, Brown *et al.* Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, CDC, August 6, 2021, 70(31); 1059-1062:

https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s_cid=mm7031e2_w

Why, then, shouldn’t both vaccinated as well as unvaccinated people be required to undergo testing? There is actually much more embarrassing information in this document - somewhat disguised because it is issued by the CDC - but I shall not take the time to comment on it: Let those with eyes see (cf. Isaiah 6:10). I am also taking the liberty of attaching a very important letter recently sent by Prof. Byram Bridle, an internationally recognized viral immunologist and vaccinologist from the University of Guelph, to the President of the University of Guelph. (You will recall that I mentioned Prof. Bridle in my original cover letter. I asked our administrators to look for “Dr. Bridles” on this campus and if they found any, to listen to them. Unfortunately, there was no response, to the detriment of the “Facts about COVID-19” article and video presented by the UW Daily Bulletin on Friday, September 10, 2021.) The letter can also be downloaded from here:

<https://childrenshealthdefense.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021-09-17-Open-letter-to-the-president-of-the-U-of-G-BBridle.pdf>

Let me now return to the practical aspects of my mandated absence from campus this Fall 2021 term. I am currently teaching two courses online, AMATH 343, “Discrete Models in Applied Mathematics” and AMATH 391, “From Fourier to Wavelets”. At the time that we were asked - back in Spring 2021, I believe - how we would like to deliver our courses for Fall 2021, I chose the online option for both, but with the plan that I

would hold a one-hour “in person office hour” for each course each week, to take place in a suitably large classroom for purposes of “distancing”. The Registrar’s Office did schedule rooms and times. Unfortunately, for obvious reasons, I am unable to meet personally with my students. On Tuesday, September 14, I met with each class on Teams – a first “getting to know you” group session which was quite successful. Otherwise, I am recording the lectures for each course, posting them on LEARN along with copies of my lecture notes. I also have three one-hour online “office hours” on Teams each week. Based upon feedback from my students in both courses, things appear to be going quite well.

As you well know, Siv, I am currently supervising two graduate students, a PhD student who is in the final stages of her program and an M.Math. student who has just begun her program. (I am withholding their names because of my intention to make this letter public.) Of course, my PhD student and I were interacting online during the entire COVID-19 pandemic and its shutdowns, etc., with no problem, and continue to do so. She is planning to defend her thesis around April 2022. I have discussed the matter of my refusal to submit to the mandatory vaccination policy with each student separately, letting each know that I would respect her decision to change supervisors with absolutely no ill feeling. Both students have expressed their desire to continue to work under my supervision. I do think - and I trust that you would agree - that it would be most unwise for the University to terminate my position before the end of the Winter 2022 term, thereby disrupting my PhD student’s thesis defense – something for which she has worked with exceptional perseverance and diligence.

I also continue, of course, to collaborate with my research colleagues online as, of course, everyone has been doing during the pandemic. I especially thank my “fractalator” colleagues for their very kind gesture toward me recently, in the form of a special issue:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1007570421001179>

I now wish to address other possible concerns with the Winter 2022 term. As Siv and David know, I am scheduled to teach PMATH 370, “Chaos and Fractals”, during that term. I taught the course for the past three offerings, i.e., W16, W18 and W20 - quite successfully, I think - and did not foresee teaching it again until asked by David if I would be able/willing to teach it in Winter 2022 - to which I replied in the affirmative. (I have enjoyed teaching this course immensely.) If UW’s mandatory vaccination policy extends into the Winter 2022 term, then I would naturally have to teach PMATH 370 online - something which I am quite prepared to do. Of course, this is predicated upon whether the Pure Mathematics Department would be willing to (1) have the course taught online and (2) taught by myself. During the early stages of writing of this letter, I was under the impression that it was quite possible that we would not be returning to full “in person” teaching in Winter 2022. The September 20 memo from the VPAP dealing with a possible return to complete in-person teaching, as well as subsequent memos from various sources, indicate otherwise. In any case, I leave this matter in David’s hands - which is why I have copied this letter to him.

There is one final aspect of my duties which will require attention - service. I trust that Siv and I shall be able to arrive at a mutually agreeable assignment of my service duties while I am away from campus.

Finally, the following matter will require your attention. Very soon - in fact, as soon as possible - I shall need to visit my office in MC 6326 at least once and most probably a few more times to bring some things home. Top on my list are my written solutions to problem sets and examinations for my AMATH 343, AMATH 391 and PMATH 370 courses. I also need to retrieve some books as well as a number of personal possessions. My question to you: Would I be able to obtain special permission to visit my office at times when others are most likely not present, e.g., late nights? Of course, I would expect some conditions, e.g., to “sign in”, wear a mask. I trust that you would inform me of what is required and hope that you would do so at your earliest convenience.

Siv and Mark, and indeed others, I consider myself extremely fortunate to be able to continue most, if not all of, my duties while being away from campus, as is the case for many, perhaps almost all, faculty in Mathematics. I am also confident that I can continue my teaching vocation in a manner that - with great thanks and appreciation - was recognized by the Faculty of Mathematics in 2019 in the form of an “Award for Distinction in Teaching”. The ability to continue one’s duties while absent from campus is also possible for many, perhaps almost all as well, staff members in our Faculty with whom we work. It is not the case, however, for many other staff members who must be physically present on campus in order to perform their duties (e.g., Plant Operations, Central Stores). My conscience does not allow me to end this letter without expressing my deepest concern and sympathy for those staff members who, for valid personal reasons, will not submit themselves to vaccination or testing, thereby jeopardizing their employment at

UW. (I know of one person from Plant Operations who was asked to leave campus on September 8 – the future of his employment at UW is uncertain at this time.) Since the time that our Open Letter was sent to the UW community, I have heard from many people who are suffering greatly, with gut-wrenching stories of fear, anguish, hopelessness and, yes, even hostility from colleagues and superiors. To add salt to the wounds, the utter insensitivity of the University administration, with its heartless (army-like?) messages such as, “Action required: You are not permitted on campus,” simply astounds me. For an institution that prides itself on a supposed sensitivity and dedication to its community members, what would it have cost for its administrators to have added a few lines of sensitivity and compassion such as, “We understand that many of you may be having great difficulty, for reasons known only to you, in making the decision whether or not to be vaccinated.” Why is our University, which is supposed to be so “innovative”, unable – or perhaps unwilling? – to accommodate these people? Is it perhaps because they are considered second-class members of this community? (If so, then I humbly join this courageous group of people, proclaiming my second-class status. They have much more to lose than I do, cf. Mark 12:41-44.) As I mentioned in my cover letters to the UW administration and faculty/staff-at-large, the mandatory vaccination policy has created two “castes” on our campus – the “vaccinated” and the “unvaccinated”. The latter, thanks to the media and our administrators, have become the outcasts, and “Action required” dictates do not help the situation - in fact, they fan the flames. I’m quite sure that if any other recognized minority group on campus were treated in the same insensitive manner, an enormous outcry would follow. Some consolation lies in the following: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10) and “All who exalt themselves will be humbled and all who humble themselves shall be exalted” (Matt. 23:12). That being said, I lament at the damage done in the meantime, namely, jobs unnecessarily lost and lives unnecessarily shattered. I have compiled some stories and would be willing to share them with anyone interested (identities of their authors withheld, of course). You may find one - the man from Plant Operations - at the website,

https://links.uwaterloo.ca/Repeal_UW_Mandatory_Vaccination_Policy/

Of course, there is possibly another consolation for people who will lose their jobs and/or suffer undue distress: **lawsuits**. I have personally offered - and shall continue to do so - to help with some of the legal costs incurred by these people.

I completely understand, Mark and Siv, that the University’s cruel - perhaps arrogant? - treatment of employees who refuse to comply with the unlawful, unethical and medically unsound mandatory vaccination policy is beyond your jurisdiction. This is a matter which warrants attention from higher levels of administration. Unfortunately, it appears that there is no such interest at these levels. I raised this matter in my original cover letter to President Goel and VPAP Rush but their reply, unfortunately, made no effort whatsoever to address or even acknowledge the issue. It is understandable that our senior administrators think - or at least wish - that the problem will eventually disappear. After all, there seems to be only a tiny minority of people (certainly in the case of faculty members) who reject the policy at this time. But what about when boosters will be required? And additional boosters (which will necessitate additional “Action required” dictates from the top)? And what if vaccines do not work as hoped? There are many researchers throughout the world, including our own local medical expert, Michael Palmer (MD) from Chemistry, UW, who are raising alarms about the possible adverse effects of repetitive booster injection, e.g., increasing amounts of synthetic lipids with cytotoxic properties which the body has trouble eliminating and ever more intense and destructive immune reactions to cells expressing the spike protein. (Unfortunately, UW doesn’t seem to recognize - or want to acknowledge - Prof. Palmer’s expertise. I suggested to the President and VPAP of UW that this institution could take the lead by having a serious panel discussion involving Prof. Palmer and the local experts featured in the September 10 Daily Bulletin “Facts about COVID-19” feature. No reply.) Perhaps as more people become aware of these adverse effects and if, unfortunately, more and more vaccine-induced tragedies occur (assuming, of course, that they are reported honestly – I know personally of a few), there will be an increasing resistance to a “mandatory booster vaccination policy”.

At this point, you may well be thinking the following: “You care so much about those who refuse to be vaccinated. What about those who have had COVID-19? What about those who have died? Don’t you care about them?” Of course, I do. I care about them deeply. This is a terrible disease and I do not wish in any way to deny this. Two of my relatives – a cousin and her son – suffered greatly and, most thankfully, recovered. I pray daily for the repose of the souls of those who have died, for the recovery of those who are seriously ill, for doctors, nurses, and caregivers and, of course, for the many people near and dear to COVID-19 patients. I also pray for more effective strategies to deal with COVID-19 - strategies that, in fact, have been advocated consistently from the beginning of this pandemic by many experts worldwide - with others such as Dr. Bridle joining them later - but which, for whatever reasons, have been suppressed.

I also do not wish to be accused of downplaying the extremely difficult situation in which institutions such as UW find themselves. In my first cover letter, I asked our administrators to seek, with the help of our local experts, innovative solutions that could accommodate both vaccinated as well as unvaccinated people - an opportunity to establish UW as a leader. Unfortunately, it does not appear that this will happen. Total vaccination has become the official panacea. I fear greatly for the damage - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual - that this panacea could produce in this and future generations.

With regard to "this and future generations," I cannot close this letter without mentioning, with great respect and admiration, our students – our most precious resource. These are the people who, in the long run, will be most affected by the mandatory vaccination policy. Many students have had to turn down their acceptance for admission to UW because of their refusal to submit to the policy – I know a few of these young people personally. Some students have deferred their studies with the hope that they will be able to resume their studies, hopefully in the not-too-distant future. Others have gone into the workforce. My best wishes and prayers go out to **all** students, regardless of their decision to be or not to be vaccinated. However, I join Dr. Byram Bridle in a special salute to those courageous students who have made sacrifices by standing up to the principles that they hold. These students, as Dr. Bridle has so beautifully discussed in interviews, are the very students whom we should desire to have on our campuses, and we hope to see them again.

I have loved this institution - and the many people within - very dearly over the past 35 years - indeed, 50 years if you go back to my undergraduate years! I pray daily that wisdom will be allowed to guide all members of the UW community both academically as well as spiritually. I also wish each and every one of you health, happiness, safety, peace of mind and, above all, Love and Wisdom.

Sincerely yours,

Edward R. Vrscaj

Department of Applied Mathematics
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<https://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~ervrscaj>

https://links.uwaterloo.ca/Repeal_UW_Mandatory_Vaccination_Policy/

<Vrscaj to Dean Chair refusal vaccination policy Sept 27 2021.pdf> <2021-09-17-Open-letter-to-the-president-of-the-U-of-G-BBridle.pdf>