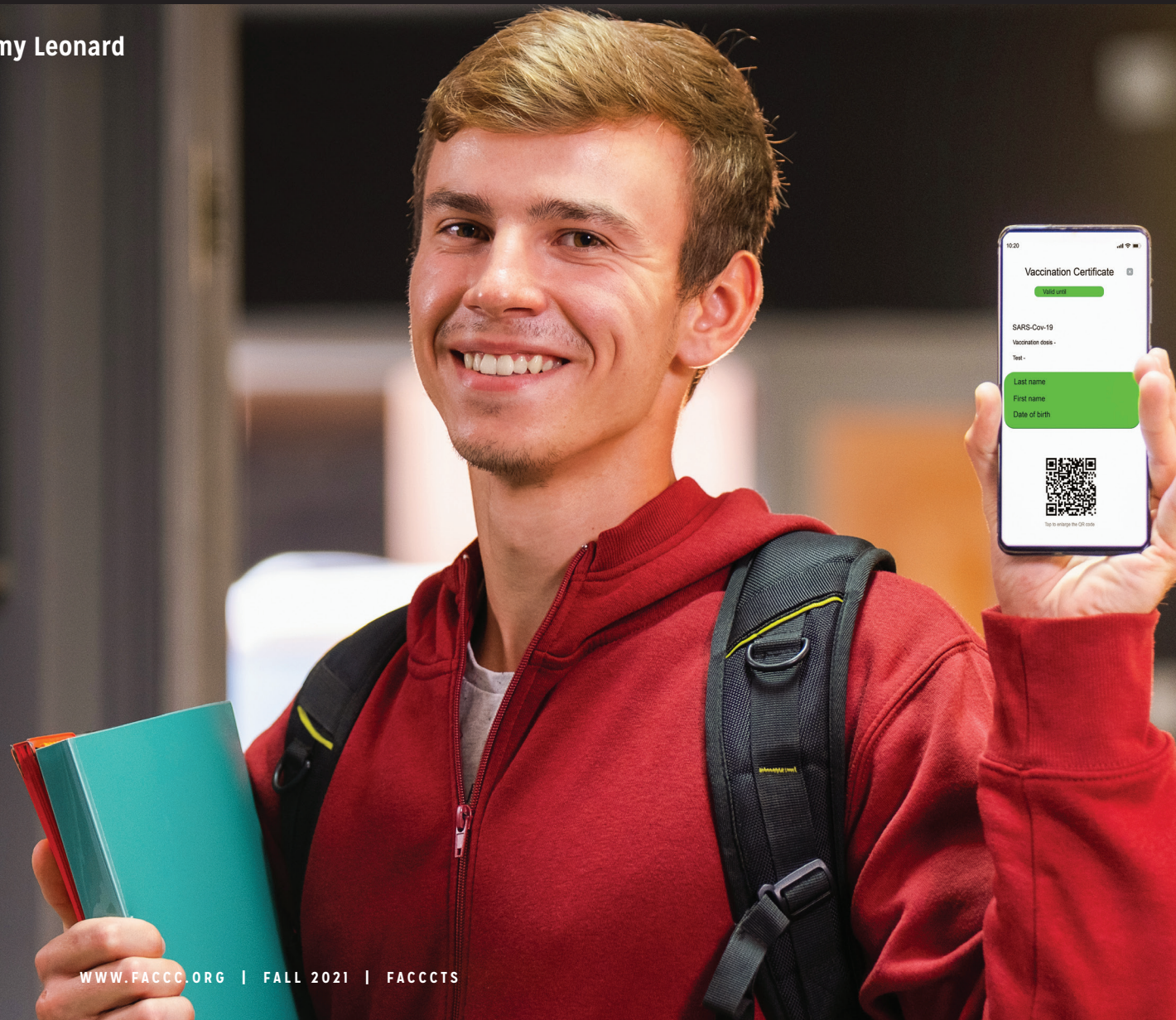


# It's All About the Vax: The Impact of Campus Vaccination Requirements on ISP Students

by Amy Leonard



Even as the Delta variant loomed over the horizon, the California Community Colleges opened up and allowed students back on campus. In a rush to create safe spaces and procedures for students, staff, and faculty, many college districts have begun requiring proof of a COVID-19 vaccination in order to return to campus.

This requirement has had an immediate impact on those studying under the International Student Program (ISP) because of the minimum requirement that all new ISP students enroll in at least one hybrid class with meetings on campus. It's past time to evaluate how these new vaccination policies will impact the ISP enrollment and population this fall.

At Pasadena City College, all students attending class on campus are required to be vaccinated. Michael R. Jones, an educational advisor for the ISP center, explains, "We are requiring vaccinations for students and staff. Everyone must have both shots by September 16 and submit proof by September 30. We are accepting all WHO vaccines, and any vaccine certificates from abroad must be translated by a certified translator."

Implementing a COVID-19 vaccination requirement among students seems to have quickly become the norm for community colleges in California. If other colleges have the same foresight as Pasadena City College to accept all World Health Organization (WHO) vaccines and vaccine certifications from abroad, this mandate may not constrain ISP students or enrollment numbers.

Joseph Ng, De Anza program supervisor of International Student Programs encouraged colleges and districts make their announcements quickly and create policies that do not harm new students. He said, "International students should not be impacted if they have received [a] vaccination approved by WHO from their home country. However, our new students will be impacted if the mandate decision is not made and announced soon because F-1 visa international students are required to enroll in a minimum of one hybrid class in fall per [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services'] COVID-19 guidance."

If college administrators plan this out efficiently, they could even use the required vaccination as a selling point by providing ISP students with the vaccine for attending on-campus classes. The San Jose Mercury

News reported, "As case rates rise due to the highly contagious delta variant, many Bay Area colleges—including UCs and CSUs—are requiring students on campus to be fully vaccinated. But schools are offering flexibility for international students from countries where vaccines may not be as widely available, allowing them to isolate for a week upon arrival and get tested weekly until they are fully vaccinated." Any added benefit for ISP students would be a great idea, considering that many community colleges have experienced declines in international enrollment over the past four years. With the pandemic accelerating this trend, ISP offices are looking for ways to creatively increase enrollment.

As community colleges begin the journey to returning to some semblance of normalcy, international student offices are taking a mindful approach with retention of students in mind.

At Pasadena City College, Jones reveals, "We have a two-pronged approach for our students. If they are studying online overseas, we will manually exclude them from the requirement [of vaccination] since they cannot get the vaccination abroad as readily and they will only be taking online courses. For the students in the U.S., the majority of students got the vaccine as soon as they could. Many of our students coming to the U.S. are also asking how soon they can get the vaccine. It was originally tight for them to get the two-dose vaccine with the timing of everything, but they now have until September 30 to get everything. Generally, I think the students here are happy about the policy since it will make them safer, and many see the vaccine as a huge privilege that they and their loved ones couldn't yet get abroad."

While it is clear that many ISP students are eager to return to campus and gain access to the vaccine, Joseph Ng cautions, "The pandemic is not over ... since many countries are still shut down and re-shut down. We cannot use our standards of [being open] to see the world, for this is a pandemic, not a common cold or flu."

Ng is correct—while we are all craving normalcy and a quick return to pre-COVID campuses, pandemics are anything but normal and predictable. Colleges will need to remain nimble enough to adapt to new variants and changing conditions on campus and off campus.