

Phoebe Liou, Informed Choice Champion

Phoebe Liou is a somewhat unlikely champion of informed choice for COVID-19 mandates. She's 19, soft spoken, and has a brilliant mind that helped her be admitted to the University of Connecticut (UConn) at 16.

But after winning multiple academic scholarships to her dream school, the tyranny of arbitrary and unnecessary COVID-19 mandates soon began to turn her [dream into a nightmare](#). A biological sciences major on the pre-dental track, Phoebe was a Babbidge Scholar, a Mortensen Scholar, a student in UConn's Honors Program, and repeatedly on the dean's list, on top of completing several internships and fellowships—before she was [forced out of her school](#) after the first semester of her sophomore year.

At first, she got an exemption to getting the vaccine. At the time, testing was not mandated, and the written exemption granted to her by UConn stated, “surveillance testing *recommended*” (emphasis added). Then, testing was [mandated](#) only for students who had a vaccine exemption. But due to a conflict with a class she had to attend—which she'd informed the university of—she missed a weekly COVID-19 test and was quickly labeled *noncompliant*.

Phoebe had issues with having to be tested in the first place since the COVID-19 tests, like the COVID-19 vaccines, were government approved under Emergency Use Authorization. This means they aren't fully tested and are, essentially, [experimental treatments](#) and tests.

Nobody told her where her genetic information would be used, nor if there were any medical privacy protections downstream.

Phoebe informed her university that she wasn't going to take

the COVID-19 tests at all because being forced to be in medical experiments is against federal law and several international laws, including the Nuremberg Code.

Phoebe had only gotten halfway through her sophomore year when the university put a hold on her student account and restricted her enrollment. "They took away \$23,000 of merit scholarships I had earned," Phoebe said.

Though most of Phoebe's friends had been vaccinated, she was quite hesitant to receive a permanent treatment. Part of the reason for her reluctance was because some people in her circle of friends and neighbors appeared to have been [harmed by the vaccine](#).

A family member of one of her high-school friends had a severe adverse reaction to the vaccine and died an hour after getting the vaccine—one of a few people Phoebe knew of who'd died shortly following vaccination. "It was frightening," Phoebe said.

Another reason she did not want to get the vaccine was because her mother, a self-employed professional musician and teacher, was questioning the vaccine and had researched the scientific data and statistics from the beginning of the pandemic. But Phoebe had a lot to lose by failing to comply with the heavy-handed test-or-vax demands of her university, as the hold on her account and loss of enrollment and scholarships proved. Despite being admitted on a merit basis, she was not allowed in her school for over a year which ruined her academic plans. She was abruptly cut off both times when she spoke publicly to the University of Connecticut's president and board of trustees.

"That experience was terrible. I was told to 'wrap it up' by the chairman," she said.

And though she'd cited to university administration U.S. federal law, the [Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human](#)

[Rights](#), the World Medical Association's [Declaration of Helsinki](#), the [Nuremberg Code](#), and other laws against forcing people to undergo medical experimentation—even in the form of a COVID-19 test—her university wouldn't budge. They took away her scholarships and made her enrollment inactive.

At this point, Phoebe had no reason not to publicly dispute the official university (and CDC) narrative that COVID-19 vaccines are necessary, safe, and effective. Still, trying to publicize her concerns on social media was difficult since her messages were being blocked by social media “disinformation” gatekeepers. So she decided she'd talk with students in person to get the word out.

In Sep. 2022, she had an on-campus event for students of UConn, offering free donuts and coffee and passing out flyers on her group's messaging.

“We asked students if they knew that faculty and staff are not mandated to get the vaccine, although the students are. All of them said ‘no.’ The few exempted students I met said they knew no one else [besides themselves] who'd not been vaccinated,” Phoebe said. “I remember being that unvaccinated person last year—I was asking myself, ‘What do I do?’ It was stressful to know I was on the verge of being kicked out, on top of trying to finish the semester with A's.”

At one time, she—like many students—felt cornered into taking the vaccine. Many don't know they have the right to an exemption.

“There's a lack of safety information, a lack of awareness on campus. But I think the general population of students know the vaccine isn't working to prevent COVID-19 infection,” Phoebe said, adding that the administrations of schools don't care about their violations of students and the legal barriers they're crossing.

“It's very disheartening. We students should not have to be

fighting for our education and our own place in college,” Phoebe said. “This was my university of choice; I had loved it. I was utterly rejected and thrown by the side of the road by them. It was like having a scarlet letter on my forehead. I couldn’t speak up.”

Out of this frustrating experience, the young Connecticut resident is in the midst of creating something positive: Northstar Students United (NSU), an advocacy group for students opposed to, questioning, or wary of being pushed into COVID-19 vaccinations or tests. The group and Phoebe’s newfound advocacy resulted from intellectual and heartfelt needs of the young scholar.

Phoebe co-founded the group with the mother of another UConn student. The first mission of NSU is to provide information, support, and a network of friends to students who wish to confer on the contentious issue of mandated vaccines and testing.

NSU’s starting ground is the University of Connecticut, but part of the idea behind the student-led group is to develop a blueprint for students across the nation to follow in their advocacy.

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Image credit: Phoebe Liou

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