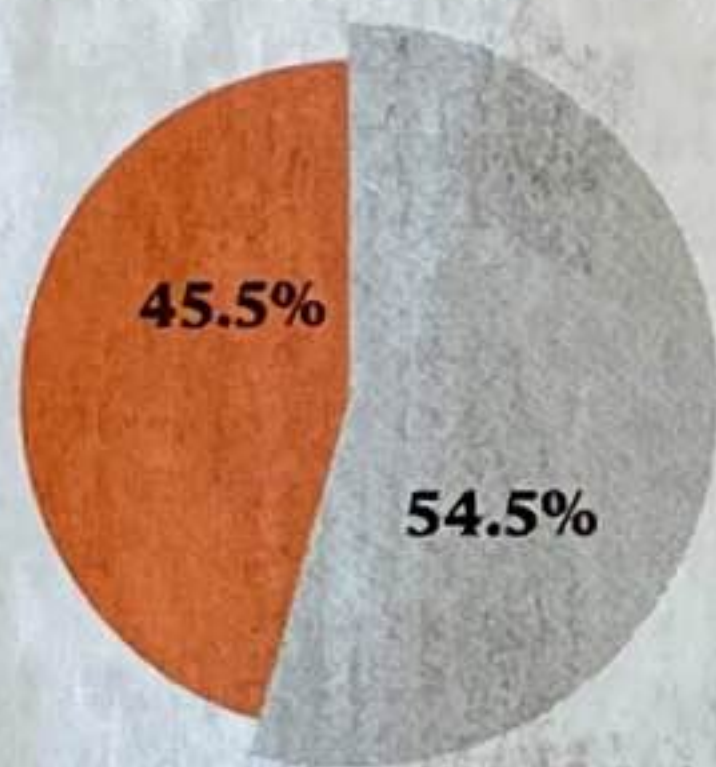
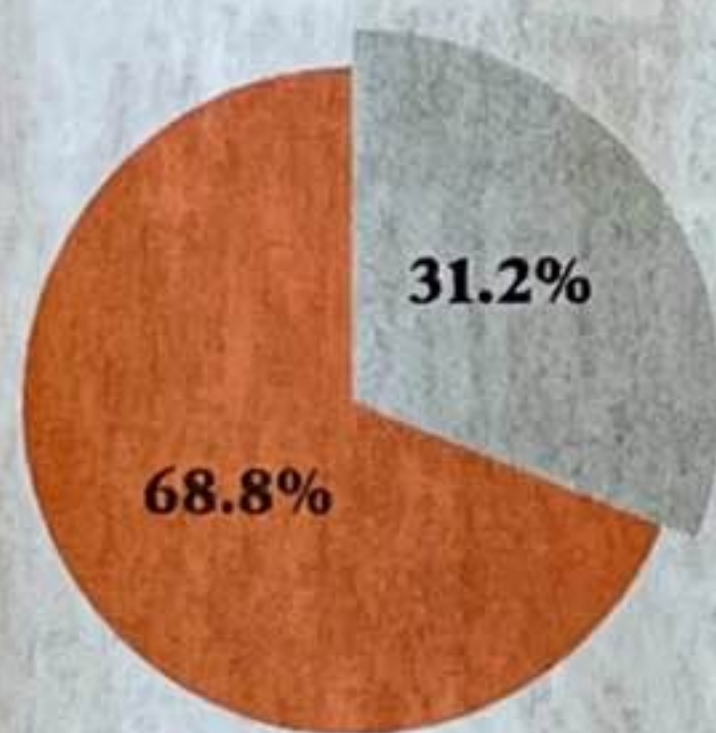


A survey sent to all Bethel community members

Have you witnessed on-campus conflict regarding wearing face coverings?



Do you support wearing masks on campus?



● Yes ● No

Kristin Sandau's team created a "creative mask meme" competition in which Bethel community members submitted memes to be judged by President Ross Allen and BSG President Elizabeth Szilagy. Additionally, colorful posters encouraging community members to continue wearing masks were posted around campus the last week of April.

"My passion is to maximize our in-person experience, which includes safety of others and cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Health," said President Ross Allen. "[Kristin Sandau's team] is working on a message to ensure students remain persistent with good mask hygiene as we finish the year, especially given the variants and the increasing impact on younger people."

CDC guidelines only allow maskless indoor interaction without social distancing for those who are fully vaccinated. There is no way to know who has been vaccinated in any given classroom, coffee shop or dorm.

"Honestly, to see people refuse to mask or respect protocols has been painful to see and dangerous for those of us who work in health-care," Kristin Sandau, who worked 30 years as a hospital nurse, said. "For us, it feels like a disregard for vulnerable folks and under-appreciation of how fortunate we are to actually have masks. We can't drop our guard too early before more are vaccinated."

Kristin Sandau cited Kaiser Health's report that more than 3600 U.S. health care workers died of COVID-19 within the first year of the pandemic.

Another nursing student spent the summer of 2020 working in the ICU. She has been granted anonymity due to strict rules from hospital organizations regarding publicizing information about employee experiences.

"It can be difficult to really understand the severity of a situation like COVID-19 unless it's staring you right in the face," she said. "I watched as COVID put the lives of pregnant mothers, healthy middle-aged adults and so many more at risk. We are all tired of wearing a mask, but they are all exhausted from fighting day in and day out on the frontlines. We all have a part to play in winning this battle against COVID-19."

Other Bethel community members who feel strongly that masks remain necessary include new Provost Robin Rylaarsdam, who also holds a Doctorate in Molecular Biology. At Bethel, she has seen noncompliance with face-covering protocols that she attributes to a combination of warm weather and COVID-19 fatigue.

While she thinks face covering protocols may still be in place come fall, Rylaarsdam expects that social-distancing guidelines may loosen significantly.

A common argument made by those opposed to the mask mandate is that no peer-reviewed studies exist proving the effectiveness of masks. Rylaarsdam points out that a peer-reviewed study only a year after the virus discovery would be impossible. Instead she points to the public health outcomes of countries who implemented mask mandates early.

"We are the wealthiest country on earth, and, through our collective actions, did not protect our citizens," Rylaarsdam said. "I don't know if we've had the worst effects of the pandemic, but we certainly have not done it best. Mask-wearing and its contention here is part of it."

Rylaarsdam believes wearing masks for the safety of those around us is a double responsibility: one as citizens and one as followers of Christ.

Petersen continues to see students in the DC neglecting masks and social distancing protocols. Encouraging mask-wearing, she cites her trust of scientists specializing in the field of disease control and knowing that COVID-19 spreads through droplets that are significantly decreased by wearing a mask.

"While [masks] are not a perfect solution, they do far better than absolutely nothing," she said. **C**