

1 Resolution #70-05  
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## The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) 3 The Pennsylvania State University



### of the 70th Assembly

September 2nd 2020

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

### Statement of Support for the Coalition of Graduate Employees at Penn State COVID-19 Justice (Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

#### Nature of the Situation:

On June 14th 2020, Penn State announced its “Back to State” plans<sup>1</sup> after a reported “three-month comprehensive planning process”. During this process, Penn State officials, including 250 faculty, staff and administrators, were charged with “developing [an] evidence-based decision-making processes aligned with public health and science”. The plan centered around the safe return of faculty and staff to research and administrative activities with a focus for the return of students to Penn State campuses.<sup>1</sup>

We, GPSA, fully believe the task force and research conducted by the administration are not enough to ensure student safety and disease prevention, and do not represent the overwhelming safety concerns of students, faculty, staff and the Penn State community at large. On August 28, 2020 Centre County reported 27 new cases of COVID-19, all among University Park students, the largest reported increase in a single day for the county since the onset of the pandemic<sup>2</sup>. This trend is alarming and reaffirms that the administration has not taken student safety as seriously as it should. Furthermore, the increase occurred after Penn State performed extensive, but not comprehensive, pre-arrival testing among students. Penn State’s decision to conduct daily surveillance testing with only one percent of the university community -- compared to 100% of on-campus students being tested bi-weekly at the University of Illinois- Urbana-Champaign, and

1 100% of the campus community tested weekly at Boston University-- makes it highly likely that  
2 cases are being undercounted and underrepresented on our campuses<sup>3</sup>.  
3

4 The administration's actions demonstrate that they are not confident in their abilities to foster a  
5 safe and healthy community. In troubling contradiction to the confident language in the "Back to  
6 State" plan, the administration attempted to force students to sign a compact<sup>4</sup> assuming full  
7 responsibility in case of COVID-19 related illness, and/or death: "I acknowledge that the Centers  
8 for Disease Control, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania State University  
9 have issued rules and precautions that may, or may not, be effective in mitigating the spread of  
10 COVID-19" and " I assume any and all risk of exposure to COVID-19 that may result from  
11 attending Penn State, or participating in Penn State activities, and I acknowledge that exposure or  
12 infection may result in personal injury, illness, permanent disability, or death". While the latter  
13 statement has since been amended, the language demonstrates that the university views community  
14 illness and death as foreseeable and acceptable risks.  
15

16 The Back to State plan is flawed and will lead to unnecessary COVID-19 cases which may result  
17 in permanent negative health consequences and/or death. President Barron has asked students "Do  
18 you want to be the person responsible for sending everyone home?" This message of  
19 individual/student responsibility demonstrates to us that the university has instituted a plan that  
20 inadequately protects students, faculty, staff, and community members. We believe the Penn State  
21 administration has the power to continue fully supporting a remote learning scenario just as other  
22 institutions have done, like Michigan State University<sup>5</sup>, Notre Dame<sup>6</sup>, Princeton<sup>7</sup>, University of  
23 North Carolina at Chapel Hill<sup>8</sup> and many others.  
24

25 In response to the Back to State plan, the Coalition for Graduate Employees (CGE) at Penn State  
26 has recently published a statement on social media<sup>9</sup> accompanied by several demands. The  
27 statement reads "The only safe decision for the fall is to move to online instruction. The later Penn  
28 State chooses to make this decision, the more drastic the consequences."  
29

30 In addition to calling for full remote instruction, CGE outlines the following COVID justice  
31 demands:

- 32 1. Penn State must invest in resources for online pedagogy and commit to providing all  
33 materials necessary for instructors (e.g. computers, adequate internet, etc.). In this  
34 inevitable shift, grace periods must be provided to undergraduates, graduates, and faculty  
35 to prepare for the shift to remote instruction and any requirement to leave campus.
- 36 2. Penn State must pay for all COVID-19 related expenses including testing and treatment.  
37 This includes ensuring continued payment of stipends should COVID-19 prevent graduate  
38 students from completing their assistantship duties.
- 39 3. Penn State must provide financial support to all employees including both instructional  
40 and non instructional staff, at pre-COVID levels. This includes guaranteed extension of  
41 funding and assistantships in accordance with delays caused by campus shutdowns.
- 42 4. Penn State must have graduate student, faculty, staff, and other student representation on  
43 any and all decision-making boards regarding COVID-19.
- 44 5. In the event of fully-remote instruction, Penn State must ensure that international students  
45 continue to receive their assistantship stipend, and protect their visa/enrollment status.

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1      **Recommended Course of Action:**  
2      By adopting this resolution, the Graduate and Professional Student Association formally  
3      supports the demands outlined above, created by the Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE) at  
4      Penn State. This will be communicated to the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Provost, and  
5      the President of Penn State by the Executive Board.

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7      <sup>1</sup><https://virusinfo.psu.edu/back-to-state>

8      <sup>2</sup><https://www.centre daily.com/news/local/education/penn-state/article245322305.html>

9      <sup>3</sup><https://cjupsu.org/home>

10     <sup>4</sup><https://nypost.com/2020/08/13/penn-state-students-must-sign-covid-19-liability-waiver-to-return/>

11     <sup>5</sup><https://statenews.com/article/2020/08/breaking-michigan-state-announces-remote-learning-for-fall-2020>

12     <sup>6</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/18/us/notre-dame-coronavirus.html>

13     <sup>7</sup><https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/08/07/fall-2020-update-undergraduate-education-be-fully-remote>

14     <sup>8</sup><https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2020/08/17/unc-chapel-hill-covid-cases-fall-semester-online-classes/3383874001/>

15     <sup>9</sup>[https://twitter.com/cge\\_psu?lang=en](https://twitter.com/cge_psu?lang=en)

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21      Respectfully submitted,

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President \_\_\_\_\_ Affirm      Veto