

Resolution # 70-12

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University**



of the 70th Assembly
October 14th, 2020

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

Racial Justice: Black Lives Matter
(Decided: [Y / N / A])

Nature of the Situation

1 Members of the Black community have continuously had their lives put at risk because of deep-
2 rooted racism in the United States. This past year has been particularly brutal. On March 13th,
3 2020, Breonna Taylor was murdered in her bedroom as police officers broke into her apartment
4 and fired dozens of rounds. On May 25th, 2020 George Floyd was murdered by asphyxiation by
5 the Minneapolis Police Department for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. Several months
6 later in Kenosha, Wisconsin, Jacob Blake was grabbed by a police officer from behind and shot
7 seven times in the back, leaving him with internal injuries and paralyzed from the waist down.
8 After a night of unrest and protest, the Wisconsin National Guard was called in. Rather than hold
9 the police accountable for their actions, Wisconsin opted to weaponize a domestic military force
10 against its own people. All too often, officers related to murders and attempted murders like these
11 have not been held accountable, thus skirting the consequences of their actions. The Black Lives
12 Matter movement was started in 2013, but support for the movement has grown exponentially in
13 2020, in part due to the above events. The Penn State GPSA has previously condemned the
14 discrimination and harassment faced by the Black community due to COVID-19 (Resolution #70-
15 01). We now must act swiftly and decisively to condemn these injustices and support the
16 community and the Black Lives Matter racial justice movement.

17 On March 20, 2019, the State College police responded to a mental health visit call. Moments
18 later, Osaze Osagie was shot and killed by the State College police. Osaze, who was Black, and a
19 person with autism and schizophrenia, was betrayed by the police and his community. Penn State

1 and the greater State College community came together to create an endowed scholarship that
2 honors Osaze - the Osaze Olufemi Osagie Memorial Scholarship for Educational Equity.¹ Though
3 this endeavor is laudable, the response from Penn State fails to protect black students and
4 community members from the systemic breakdowns that led to Osaze's death.

5
6 The 3/20 Coalition, named after the date of the shooting Osaze Osagie, is a local community
7 organization which has organized a number of protests and teach-ins to put pressure on local
8 officials to reopen the case and to release the identity of the officers involved in the case². The
9 organization has ten demands which they read at the protests they organize. These demands include
10 the implementation of a community advisory board to address instances of discrimination, bias
11 and racism in State College government and police, the release of the names of all officers involved
12 in all shootings and the firing of the officer who killed Osagie, and transparency and the release of
13 policing data regarding policing with special attention to race and ethnicity³. Many Penn State
14 students and faculty have attended these protests in support of the organizations' local and national
15 aims for racial justice.

16
17 We recognize that there have been instances of racial injustice on campus at the hands of people
18 in power, especially against Black graduate and professional students. Some of these grievances
19 include but are not limited to racial remarks made by Penn State faculty, a current culture of racial
20 bias at the university, lack of representation of people of color, and the feeling that the Penn State
21 administration is not listening to impacted communities.

22
23 We acknowledge that the university has taken steps towards racial reconciliation, such as the
24 creation of a task force to protect its marginalized students, but there is still work to do. The
25 recruitment and retention of graduate students of color and the retention and promotion of faculty
26 of color to better reflect our student body's diversity is a necessity. The Penn State community will
27 need better funding for quality inclusion training for students, faculty, staff, administrators, and
28 Board of Trustee members to do this feasibly. In addition to the faculty, the university should
29 ensure that the Board of Trustees and members of the various task forces reflect the diversity of
30 our campus community.

31
32 The relationship between law enforcement officials and community members lies at the heart of
33 the issue of systemic racism. Penn State University spends large amounts of money to support the
34 University Park police force. According to the University Police & Public Safety report on
35 revenues and expenditures, in Fall 2020, the total expenses for University Park Police Operations
36 amounted to \$7,495,355, with \$5,596,591 covering personnel expenses and \$1,898,764 covering
37 operating expenses⁴. Operating expenses cover daily costs such as patrol vehicles, safety
38 equipment, uniforms, travel, professional development, and police specific technology and
39 software. Further budget breakdown is available in the State College Borough 2020 Annual
40 Report⁵.

¹<https://news.psu.edu/story/592351/2019/10/09/administration/community-penn-state-help-raise-50000-osaze-osagie-memorial>

²<https://www.facebook.com/320-Coalition-2244750575843126>

³http://www.statecollege.com/news/local-news/320-coalition-seeks-response-to-demands.1483433/?fbclid=IwAR0ZOX185_R878QimYnEE7EjtZBy3Jb53_P-gZSgp-KGao7astLHIXIaSU

⁴https://fandb.psu.edu/sites/fandb/files/upps_funding_summary_fy18_fy19_fy20_and_fy21.pdf

⁵<http://www.statecollegepa.us/DocumentCenter/View/22221/2020-Adopted-Budget-no-appendices>

1 While it is important that these public services are funded, it is imperative that these funds are
2 contributing to a police department that is accessible and available to help all students. Reviewing
3 the results of the 2019 University Police and Public Safety Survey reveals the tension that exists
4 between our minority community members and the University Police. In this survey, 80% non-
5 minority respondents agreed with the statement “University Police officers are respectful to people
6 like me,” whereas only 65% respondents belonging to minority communities agreed⁶. Similarly,
7 8% of respondents belonging to minority communities reported feeling targeted by University
8 Police due to their racial or ethnic identity, compared to 0% of non-minority respondents⁷. In
9 addition, 26% of minority students reported that they would not feel comfortable contacting the
10 University Police if they were in need of assistance⁷. Similar issues in the relationship between
11 community members and the State College Police Department (SCPD) were revealed in the 2020
12 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) assessment of the SCPD. When community
13 members were asked about their perceptions of the procedural justice carried out by the SCPD,
14 approximately 25% of the respondents stated that they had experienced some level of
15 discrimination by the SCPD⁸.

16
17 We acknowledge that both the University Police and SCPD have taken steps in addressing these
18 critical issues that lie in law enforcement in University Park and State College. However, much
19 remains to be done in terms of transparency and action. The State College Borough 2020 Annual
20 Report lists several continuing education programs for police officers. This mandatory training
21 includes instruction on the use of force and firearms, crisis intervention, and cultural awareness
22 and sensitivity training, among others⁹. It is not clear what the cultural awareness and sensitivity
23 training consists of or what material is covered in this training. Greater transparency is needed in
24 order to ensure that officers are receiving comprehensive instruction in order to address potential
25 implicit bias and discriminatory attitudes towards minority groups. President Eric Barron also
26 recently announced the reconvening of a task force to improve the relationship between law
27 enforcement officials and members of minority communities, with the task force comprising of
28 university and local community leaders¹⁰. While we acknowledge that the reconvened task force
29 is still in its infancy, it is crucial that those involved in law enforcement reform constantly update
30 the community on the progress that is being made with regards to these changes, so as to provide
31 assurance to the community that these initiatives will translate into concrete changes within the
32 police force. This transparency and accountability is critical to all members of the student body
33 and State College community feeling safe and secure.

34
35 This transparency is also required in the several other initiatives announced by President Eric
36 Barron in June 2020 to address racism, bias, and community safety. While information regarding
37 the goals and people involved in these initiatives can be found on the Action Together website¹¹,
38 updates on the progress of these initiatives have not been posted on the website, making it
39 challenging to find information on what, if any, progress is being made. One such initiative was

⁶ <https://www.police.psu.edu/university-police-community-survey-reports>

⁷ <https://news.psu.edu/story/633870/2020/09/30/administration/task-force-policing-and-communities-color-reconvened-more>

⁸ <https://www.statecollegepa.us/DocumentCenter/View/22530/IACP-Assessment-of-SCPD-Policy-and-Procedures---Final-Report>

⁹ <http://www.statecollegepa.us/DocumentCenter/View/22221/2020-Adopted-Budget-no-appendices>

¹⁰ <https://news.psu.edu/story/633870/2020/09/30/administration/task-force-policing-and-communities-color-reconvened-more>

¹¹ <https://actiontogether.psu.edu/ongoing-initiatives>

1 the assembly of a diversity task force to review and revise the Student Code of Conduct relating
2 to racism, bias, and community safety across campus. A progress report was provided by the task
3 force during the Penn State Board of Trustees meeting on September 18th, 2020, and provided the
4 following recommendations¹²: modify the purpose and introduction of the code so there would be
5 more optimistic and inclusive language; introduce a mandatory module regarding racism and bias
6 for students to complete before registering for classes; modify the language under a substantial
7 university interest in the area of jurisdiction; take legal action when an incident occurs; recommend
8 changes but still incorporate existing principle of the university; and add two new sections to the
9 Code of Conduct, the first being commitment to diversity and inclusion, and the second being
10 education on the student conduct. The progress report provided to the Board of Trustees has not
11 been well communicated to the student body¹³. No other updates have been shared publicly.

12
13 Adding to the lack of transparency in terms of the progress being made on the Action Together
14 initiatives, is the unclear structure of how the multiple commissions, task forces, and committees
15 involved will collaborate and be overseen. In addition to the diversity task force conducting the
16 full review of the Student Code of Conduct, President Barron announced seven other initiatives,
17 including: a Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias and Community Safety to examine the
18 deployment of university resources to address social issues related to racism and bias; a task force
19 on Policing and Communities of Color to examine where progress has, or has not been made since
20 this task force completed its work in 2017; an initiative to ensure that education and employment
21 equality has the attention of the Board of Trustees; working to initiate mandatory bias training for
22 all employees; working to require racism and bias course work; improving policies that will
23 increase the hiring and retention of faculty who are members of underrepresented groups; and
24 prioritizing the well-being of all students and employees¹⁴. It is unclear if independent groups
25 working on these initiatives with overlapping goals have any formal oversight to facilitate
26 collaboration and ensure that accountability and responsibility are not lost in the multitude of
27 commissions, task forces, and committees.

28
29 Transparency is also needed to ensure appropriate representation of graduate students and
30 minorities in all of the commissions, task forces, committees, and groups involved in the Action
31 Together initiatives. Members lists are available for the diversity task force reviewing the Student
32 Code of Conduct and the Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias and Community Safety.
33 However, it is unclear who is involved in carrying out the other initiatives announced by President
34 Barron. The diversity task force consists of 26 members with student, faculty, and staff
35 representation, including three graduate and professional students (two of whom are people of
36 color). The Presidential Commission consists of 19 members with undergraduate student, faculty,
37 staff, and alumni representation; however, no graduate or professional students are included as
38 members. For efforts to address racism, bias and community safety to be successful in advancing
39 meaningful change, it is essential to have representation from all levels in the University, and
40 particularly representation from people of color.

41
42 GPSA's call for Penn State to explicitly address issues of racial justice, police violence, and the
43 need for explicit anti-racist instruction in educational settings aligns with broader student activist

¹² https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_8877f270-fa15-11ea-afee-d31328f59a9c.html

¹³ <https://news.psu.edu/story/632279/2020/09/17/administration/task-force-shares-progress-recommendations-following-review>

¹⁴ <https://actiontogether.psu.edu/ongoing-initiatives>

1 movements across the country. Students at the University of Southern California, for example,
2 have called upon their administration to divest from the Department of Public Safety and sever
3 relationships with the Los Angeles Police Department; increase focus on hiring Black, Indigenous,
4 and other faculty/staff of color; increase the Black student population and student representation
5 on the Board of Trustees (with a focus on introducing diverse perspectives); develop mandatory
6 diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice trainings for staff, faculty, and students; and make
7 explicit commitments as to how the university will respond to future incidents of anti-Black racism
8 on- and off-campus¹⁵. Similarly, graduate students who went on strike at the University of
9 Michigan included within their list of demands a call for the university to defund the university
10 police by 50% and to cut all ties with the Ann Arbor Police Department and Immigration and
11 Customs Enforcement (ICE)¹⁶. Earlier this month, multiple student government organizations at
12 Ohio State made similar calls for the university to cease on-campus police operations and to review
13 off-campus contracts with local police¹⁷.

14
15 Additionally, student organizations at all three of the campuses listed above have also called for
16 higher education leaders to consider the role of education itself in the perpetuation of anti-Black
17 violence and the maintenance of white supremacist structures. These student activists have called
18 for upper administration and faculty alike to interrogate the centering of whiteness in curricula and
19 pedagogy, and to make a commitment to integrating culturally reflective and sustaining modes of
20 instruction across the curriculum. This call is particularly urgent given President Trump’s recent
21 Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping¹⁸ which, among other things, seeks to
22 prohibit power-conscious diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice initiatives by federal
23 offices, government contractors, and recipients of federal grants. The order also calls on
24 educational institutions to exclusively promote a “pro-American” curriculum that excludes
25 scholarship by faculty using Critical Race Theory and other explicitly anti-racist frameworks. The
26 federal administration has threatened to defund educational systems that develop curricula based
27 on this scholarship (and is already in the process of investigating the California Public School
28 System¹⁹), which will have a disparate impact on Black, Indigenous, and other scholars of color
29 who are the primary authors of such work²⁰. We are already seeing the harm of this policy - the
30 University of Iowa decided in early October to temporarily halt all diversity, equity and inclusion
31 initiatives on their campus²¹ and to ‘reassess’ graduate student and faculty research projects
32 focused on topics of race, gender, sexuality, and class over fears that the federal administration
33 will revoke federal funding and grant opportunities. Other institutions have taken a different
34 approach. Responding to graduate student calls for action, leadership at the University of Michigan
35 published a “Statement on Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping”²² that, in
36 part, expressed a commitment to academic freedom and the importance of supporting graduate
37 student and faculty research, teaching, and service toward racial equity and justice.

¹⁵ <https://dailytrojan.com/2020/08/12/call-to-action-confronting-racial-injustice-on-campus/>

¹⁶ <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2020/09/from-covid-testing-to-cops-university-of-michigan-graduate-students-explain-why-theyre-striking.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.thelantern.com/2020/09/students-protest-public-safety-notice-racial-injustice/>

¹⁸ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/>

¹⁹ <https://ktla.com/news/california/department-of-education-will-investigate-use-of-1619-project-in-california-schools-trump-says/>

²⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/06/politics/trump-education-department-1619-project/index.html>

²¹ <https://dailyiowan.com/2020/10/05/university-of-iowa-will-halt-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-training-after-white-house-executive-order/>

²² <https://president.umich.edu/news-communications/statements/statement-on-executive-order-on-combating-race-and-sex-stereotyping/>

1 **Recommended Course of Action:**

2 The Penn State GPSA formally recommends the university take the following actions. These
3 recommended actions will be communicated to the Vice President for Student Affairs, the Provost,
4 and the President of Penn State by the Executive Board either in meetings or in a formal email.
5

- 6 1. Through collaboration with the Student Restorative Justice Initiative, we recommend that
7 the police budget, that was recently released on September 2, 2020²³, be updated to include
8 more details about operating expenses. The current document has a footnote stating that
9 "Operating Cost are the daily cost that are necessary to conduct policing such as patrol
10 vehicles, safety equipment, uniforms, travel, professional development, and police specific
11 technology and software." We would like to see a breakdown of how the money is
12 distributed among these categories, with specific identification of the amount of money
13 spent on weapons/arms, as operating costs saw a major increase between 2018-2019 and
14 have remained high. We also would like to see a declaration of the amount and nature of
15 funds/resources used for COVID regulation enforcement.
- 16 2. We recommend that the commissions and task forces that were recently developed²⁴,
17 including the Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias and Community Safety, the Task
18 force on Policing and Communities of Color, and the task force charged with the review
19 of the Student Code of Conduct, post regular updates on a combined website. Although the
20 Action Together website provides information on the formation of the initiatives, updates
21 on the initiatives are not posted to this website. We recommend that each group post a
22 status update minimally bi-weekly, where members of the Penn State community can see
23 the status of these initiatives. The Code of Conduct review task force has provided an
24 update to the Board of Trustees, but this update could be more accessible if it is on this
25 combined website, rather than in Penn State News.²⁵
- 26 3. We further recommend that the task force and committee chairs be compensated, either in
27 perhaps teaching release or release of service responsibilities by department administration
28 for faculty. For staff and students, we recommend that the administration find additional
29 creative ways to compensate these students for their time.
- 30 4. We recommend that each task force and commission include graduate and professional
31 student representation with at least one graduate student with a diverse background. For
32 example, the Black Graduate Student Association (BGSA) serves as a representative body
33 for Black graduate students at Penn State and would be an excellent starting point for
34 representatives for the task forces.
- 35 5. We recommend that the Board of Trustees rethink their recently released "goal of at least
36 50% underrepresented groups on the board by 2025."²⁶ Accomplishing this goal could be
37 achieved without meaningful change not only in the membership of the Board of Trustees
38 but also in the culture. We recommend that the Board of Trustees pursue more meaningful
39 strategies to not only diversify the Board, but to also improve the culture that the Board
40 promotes as the senior leaders at Penn State.

23 <https://fandb.psu.edu/university-shares-police-and-public-safety-budget-data>

24 <https://actiontogether.psu.edu/ongoing-initiatives>

25 <https://news.psu.edu/story/632279/2020/09/17/administration/task-force-shares-progress-recommendations-following-review>

26 <https://news.psu.edu/story/626095/2020/07/17/administration/trustees-move-diversify-board-effort-become-more-inclusive>

- 1 6. We recommend that Penn State pursue advocacy efforts to counter the recent Executive
2 Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping.²⁷ This Executive Order will actively
3 detract from the efforts of Penn State, with federally funded initiatives, to pursue anti-racist
4 initiatives. We stand with scholars working in these areas and call on the administration to
5 take an explicit stance in support and solidarity with faculty, students, and staff whose work
6 may run afoul of the “pro-American curriculum” movement.
7 7. We recommend that Penn State provides funding for quality inclusion training for students,
8 faculty, staff, administrators, and Board of Trustee members.
9 8. We recommend ensuring that faculty, Board of Trustees members and task forces reflect
10 the diversity of our society and increase efforts to recruit and retain a diverse campus
11 community.

Respectfully submitted,
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President _____ Affirm Veto

The Graduate and Professional Student Association

²⁷<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping/>