

Resolution # 70-20

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



**of the 70th Assembly**  
February 3, 2021

*Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,*

**Safety first: Racist and Homophobic Acts of Vandalism at Penn State**  
(Decided: [ Y / N / A ])

1 **Nature of the Situation:**

2  
3 On January 7, 2021 stickers containing messages from a white supremacist group were  
4 reported on property throughout the downtown area of State College. About 50 stickers  
5 with the name and website of the group Patriot Front were found<sup>1</sup>. Patriot Front is  
6 classified as a far-right, white-nationalist hate group by the Southern Poverty Law  
7 Center<sup>2</sup>.

8  
9 The State College Borough first heard about the stickers on Thursday. Action to remove  
10 the stickers began on Friday morning. Stickers were found in at least 30 locations,  
11 including street signs, benches, and light posts, both downtown and on campus<sup>3</sup>. The  
12 Borough spokesperson, Douglas Shontz, strongly condemned the actions of the vandals  
13 and encouraged residents to report stickers through the online graffiti-reporting form or

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.statecollege.com/state-college-borough-investigating-after-white-supremacist-stickers-found-around-downtown/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/patriot-front>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.statecollege.com/state-college-police-looking-to-identify-2-suspects-in-connection-with-white-supremacist-stickers-found-around-downtown/>

1 by calling the State College Borough hotline. The information of the stickers' locations is  
2 being passed to the police with hopes of identifying any individuals involved. It is believed  
3 that the same group was responsible for the vandalism of a Pride Flag mural in  
4 Bellefonte.<sup>4</sup>

5  
6 While this instance appears to be the first time that this specific group has vandalized  
7 State College and university property, it is not the first time that white supremacists and  
8 other far-right extremists have vandalized university property. In 2017, a number of  
9 recruitment flyers from the white supremacist group Identity Europa were seen around  
10 the University Park campus. President Barron later issued a statement condemning the  
11 presence of these flyers. However, despite the hurt it caused to students on campus, the  
12 University did little to remove these flyers, citing the university's obligation to upholding  
13 free speech<sup>5</sup>. In 2019, a racial slur was found graffitied on a wall in Simmons Hall, one of  
14 the dorms designated for Schreyer students<sup>6</sup>. Although Peggy Johnson, Dean of the  
15 Schreyer Honors College, sent a message stating that the College and Penn State were  
16 "committed to creating and maintaining an educational and residential environment that  
17 respects the rights of all individuals to participate fully in the community", it remains  
18 unclear if there was an investigation to find those responsible. Just recently, on January  
19 27, 2021 the Black Student Caucus held their Spring Involvement Fair via Zoom. Their  
20 Zoom event was attacked by white supremacists who "directed numerous racist and  
21 homophobic slurs at three Black Caucus Executive Board members" and filled the chat  
22 with anti-Semitic and white supremacist language along with other offensive behaviors<sup>7</sup>.  
23 President Baron responded by stating "University leadership continues to stand in  
24 solidarity with you and all individuals who are victims of hate and prejudice", and that the  
25 incident has been reported to the police<sup>8</sup>, but there is no clear outline of the actions the  
26 University will take against these types of attacks.

27  
28 Penn State is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) with 65 percent of White students  
29 compared to 5.6 percent of African American, 6.4 percent of Asian American, and 7.7  
30 percent Hispanic/Latino students<sup>9</sup>. In this given environment, students of color may  
31 experience a lower sense of belonging and support by the institution. These marginalized  
32 students may feel especially threatened and targeted due to the recent acts of vandalism  
33 by white supremacists.

34  
35 It is imperative that Penn State addresses these incidents of racist and homophobic  
36 vandalism. Penn State University prides itself in being an institution that seeks to foster  
37 an inclusive environment where students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds are

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.statecollege.com/community-members-take-quick-action-to-repair-bellefonte-mural-defaced-by-white-supremacist-group/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://wjactv.com/news/local/white-supremacy-flyers-prompt-student-outrage-at-penn-state>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article\\_dc4c9d90-08be-11ea-bd0d-77818c059213.html](https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_dc4c9d90-08be-11ea-bd0d-77818c059213.html)

<sup>7</sup><https://onwardstate.com/2021/01/29/penn-state-black-caucus-receives-slurs-hate-speech-through-involvement-fair-zoom-bombing/>

<sup>8</sup><https://news.psu.edu/story/645947/2021/01/30/administration/message-president-barron-recent-hate-filled-zoom-incidents>

<sup>9</sup> Based on 2018 - 2019. <https://admissions.psu.edu/apply/statistics/>

1 respected and celebrated. This spirit of inclusion is thwarted when racist and homophobic  
2 harassment is not recognized for the harm that they cause to our community. The Student  
3 Code of Conduct defines harassment as “behavior consisting of physical or verbal  
4 conduct that is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive so as to substantially interfere  
5 and creates a hostile environment with an individual’s employment, education or access  
6 to University programs, activities or opportunities and would detrimentally affect a  
7 reasonable person under the same circumstances.”<sup>10</sup> If the perpetrators of any recent or  
8 future racist and homophobic acts of vandalism are found to be students affiliated with  
9 the university, the administration should recognize these acts as harassment under the  
10 Student Code of Conduct, as these acts create a hostile environment for members of our  
11 community. In order to ensure that all members of our community feel safe and respected,  
12 it is important University address these subversive acts of vandalism.  
13  
14

### 15 **Recommended Course of Action:**

- 16
- 17 • That University leadership issue a statement condemning the hate crimes  
18 perpetrated by the Patriot Front in early January 2021.
- 19 • That the University commits to ensuring that any future acts of vandalism that  
20 threaten the safety of students are dealt with swiftly, and any material associated  
21 with white supremacist and far-right groups found on University property are  
22 removed immediately.
- 23 • That students found to be involved in racist and homophobic acts of vandalism,  
24 such as distribution of propaganda associated with white supremacist and far-right  
25 extremist groups, have strict action taken against them following due hearings, as  
26 such acts would be in violation of the Student Code of Conduct.
- 27 • That the University highlight and expand any and all available resources that  
28 provide useful skills and information for working with LGBTQ people. These  
29 trainings include discussions on definitions and language to advocate for the rights  
30 and safety of LGBTQ people and their allies more effectively. These trainings also  
31 help create a supportive community by identifying members committed to ending  
32 homophobia and transphobia.
- 33 • That the University partners with community organizations to offer methods of  
34 intervention against racist and homophobic acts. To combat such behavior and  
35 make the school safer, it is useful to know successful and appropriate tactics and  
36 intervention strategies. These methods will equip others with effective ways to  
37 reduce bullying and harassment.
- 38 • That the University hosts a diversity or multicultural-based training specifically for  
39 students. To build stronger coalitions and allies, it is important that our student  
40 body be more inclusive of other identities. These trainings give students the skills  
41 to build partnerships with other marginalized communities and help them  
42 understand the importance of our diverse and multicultural communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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<sup>10</sup> <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/support-safety-conduct/student-conduct/code-conduct>

**Diego Hernandez**  
Advocacy and Diversity Committee  
Chair Delegate, College of Liberal Arts

**Brooke Mattern**  
Delegate, College of Health and Human Development

**Sanga Jung**  
Delegate, College of Nursing

**Emory Robertson**  
Delegate, School of Law

**Lyana Sun Han Chang**  
Delegate, College of Liberal Arts

**Sandeep Krishnakumar**  
Delegate, College of Engineering

President \_\_\_\_\_ Veto

Affirm

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The Graduate and Professional Student Association