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 ])

Nature of the Situation:

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

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

---

\(^1\)https://www.statecollege.com/state-college-borough-investigating-after-white-supremacist-stickers-found-around-downtown/

\(^2\)https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/patriot-front

by calling the State College Borough hotline. The information of the stickers’ locations is being passed to the police with hopes of identifying any individuals involved. It is believed that the same group was responsible for the vandalism of a Pride Flag mural in Bellefonte.\(^4\)

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

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

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

---

\(^4\)https://www.statecollege.com/community-members-take-quick-action-to-repair-bellefonte-mural-defaced-by-white-supremacist-group/
\(^6\)https://www.collegian.psu.edu/news/campus/article_dc4c9d90-08be-11ea-bd0d-77818c059213.html
\(^7\)https://onwardstate.com/2021/01/29/penn-state-black-caucus-receives-slurs-hate-speech-through-involvement-fair-zoom-bombing/
\(^8\)https://news.psu.edu/story/645947/2021/01/30/administration/message-president-barron-recent-hate-filled-zoom-incidents
respected and celebrated. This spirit of inclusion is thwarted when racist and homophobic harassment is not recognized for the harm that they cause to our community. The Student Code of Conduct defines harassment as “behavior consisting of physical or verbal conduct that is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive so as to substantially interferes and creates a hostile environment with an individual’s employment, education or access to University programs, activities or opportunities and would detrimentally affect a reasonable person under the same circumstances.”\textsuperscript{10} If the perpetrators of any recent or future racist and homophobic acts of vandalism are found to be students affiliated with the university, the administration should recognize these acts as harassment under the Student Code of Conduct, as these acts create a hostile environment for members of our community. In order to ensure that all members of our community feel safe and respected, it is important University address these subversive acts of vandalism.

**Recommended Course of Action:**

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

Respectfully submitted,

\textsuperscript{10} 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 ___________________________________________________       Affirm

Veto

The Graduate and Professional Student Association