

To: The University Senate

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Subject: On Purdue administrative disciplinary action against protesting students

Disposition: University Senate for Discussion and Adoption

Rationale: On April 30, 2024, four leaders of the protests on university campus were issued individual notices of charges by the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for violations in connection with the peaceful protests currently on the south portion of Memorial Mall. The charges were under Student Code of Conduct 2c (Obstruction or Disruption of University Activity), 2g (Unauthorized use of University property), 2h (Violation of any University rule governing student organizations, or the use of University property) and 2k (Failure to comply with directions of University officials). [1]

The possible penalties associated with these charges are severe and include suspension and expulsion. For all the students concerned these penalties might significantly harm their life chances. In addition, all the students charged individually are students of color,

and two of the students are international students, and suspension or expulsion would lead to a loss of status in the US and therefore deportation. [2]

The students at the encampment have not, collectively or individually, disrupted classes, other students, faculty or administrative staff from the conduct of the business of teaching and learning. Nor have students, collectively or individually, engaged in threats or behavior that might be construed as threatening other students' safety or wellbeing.

Purdue University has a stated commitment to free speech and academic freedom. [2] By limiting the rights of students to gather and express political thought, the university endangers these rights, and by extension the rights of free speech and academic inquiry for the entire Purdue community. [3]

As detailed in the American Association of University Professors' statement "In Defense of the Right to Free Speech and Peaceful Protest on University Campuses" [4]:

When university administrators limit when, where, and how free speech may be exercised, and require advanced applications for permission of such expression, they effectively gut the right itself. To insist that harsh discipline [... is] necessary to combat hate on a college campus is a pretext to suppress protest and silence speech.

Given the severe consequences on the lives of the students concerned and the extraordinary circumstances currently unfolding on campuses nationally, it is crucial that the Purdue University Senate's voice be heard on this matter.

Proposal:

The Purdue University Senate strongly objects to the steps taken by the university to criminalize student protest on campus.

Using the University Code of Conduct in this heavy-handed and arbitrary manner is entirely unjustified. This excessive response is an affront to the very spirit of civic engagement that university education is meant to instill among students.

The actions for which the student leaders are being charged are all collective actions and singling these individuals, even though they are in leadership, is punitive. Furthermore, singling out these individuals while most of the participants in the encampment are white will have a chilling effect on students of color.

Therefore, the Senate calls upon the administration to refrain from disciplinary action against individual students who have engaged in peaceful protests.

This document serves as speaking for the Purdue University Senate at West Lafayette.

References:

[1] [Purdue University Code of Conduct](#)

[2] [Purdue ISS F1: Violation of Status](#)

[3] [Purdue University Commitment to Free Speech](#)

[4] [AAUP Statement: In Defense of the Right to Free Speech and Peaceful Protest on University Campuses](#)