

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact:

Aseal Tineh - amtineh@uchicago.edu

Stephanie Greene - stephaniegreene9@uchicago.edu

Sara Zubi - szubi@uchicago.edu

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO FAILS TO RESPOND ADEQUATELY TO ANTI-PALESTINIAN AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND MISOGYNY IN AEPI AND FRATERNITY CULTURE ON CAMPUS

This following statement was endorsed and passed as a student resolution by the University of Chicago Student Government on Monday, February 8, 2016.

On February 3, 2016, an anonymous whistleblower of the Jewish fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi) at the University of Chicago, leaked yet another manifestation of toxic and hateful culture perpetuated in Greek Life. Several emails were sent among the AEPi brothers over the course of the last five years containing a plethora of Islamophobic, anti-Black, anti-Palestinian, and misogynistic hate speech. In addition to use of the n-word, included in these emails are references to explosives as “long-held fixtures” of Islam; an empty, abandoned lot as Palestine; Palestinians and Arabs as “Towel Heads;” and a Palestinian-American Muslim member of Student Government as a “terrorist.” Also uncovered in the emails is evidence of an informal “constitution” with excessive references to women in derogatory and body-shaming language.

In an email to the student body, the office of Campus and Student Life at the University of Chicago noted the incident with claims that such hate speech “violate[s] the University’s core values” and asked students to help overcome such a disastrous occurrence by completing a campus climate survey due to launch this spring.

Though the University referenced Muslims, African Americans, and women in its email, it failed to acknowledge the attacks on Palestinian-American students, who were the primary target of most of the hateful emails.

Evidence of a toxic campus climate is highly prevalent. Even without results from the upcoming campus climate survey, one need only note what minority students have experienced and what students of marginalized populations have already presented as evidence to the administration. Such evidence includes:

- In 2010, Maurice Dawson, a black student at the University, was thrown out of The Joseph Regenstein Library and arrested for being “too loud” in a space designated for cooperative learning and socializing.

- In 2012, the Delta Upsilon Fraternity (DU) placed a Confederate flag near what was then the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs.
- On May 8, 2012, the Alpha Delta Phi Fraternity held a pledging event involving “first-year pledges performing a racial caricature, mowing the lawn in front of the fraternity house wearing oversized sombreros while Latin music played from a stereo.”
- On May 28, 2012, DU hosted a party titled “DU Presents: Conquistadors and Aztec Hoes [sic],” which encouraged attendees to bring “an unlimited need to conquer, spread disease, and enslave natives.”
- On October 31, 2014, a number of students chose to wear 'cholo' (a derogatory term for Mexican-American men) costumes for Halloween. One of these students posed for a picture with his hands behind his back while a white student wearing a police costume pretended to beat him.

Palestinian students and members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) have repeatedly been attacked without any appropriate response from the University. These incidents include:

- In April and May 2014, a Palestinian was repeatedly attacked with false allegations of anti-Semitism in an attempt to prevent her from being elected to a seat in Student Government due to her political activism.
- In May 2015, a Palestinian student and member of SJP received a threatening message addressed to her personal Facebook account warning her against her continued activism.
- In fall 2015, SJP posters were vandalized with the word “terrorists” and destroyed.
- Again in fall 2015, anonymous flyers spread on campus with the tagline “SJP: Stabbing Jews for Peace.” These were accompanied by the University of Chicago logo.
- Additionally in fall 2015, a pseudonymous Facebook user attacked individual SJP members including sending countless homophobic and transphobic comments, false accusations of supporting terrorism, and threats to release “graphic nudes” of one SJP member around campus.

For many years, members of SJP have been asking the administration to release a statement condemning the anti-Palestinian harassment and hate speech. The University has been unresponsive to these requests.

In its failure to respond to these and many other incidents, including the recent AEPi emails, the University illustrates its lack of concern for the safety, security and ability of marginalized communities to fully participate on campus.

In light of the leaked AEPi emails and the unfortunate lack of an adequate response from the university administration, we, the undersigned, officially demand the following from the University of Chicago:

1. To immediately and indefinitely suspend the University’s relationship with AEPi and all access to University resources including, but not limited to their access to funding, their Center for Leadership and Involvement advisor, and the ability to use campus spaces for events pending a formal investigation

2. To release redacted email records, especially those that target and mention specific students, as well as proof of appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with results from a formal investigation; within legal bounds
3. To acknowledge and apologize for the administration's complicit silence and inaction regarding the attacks directed specifically at members of the Palestinian community on campus and members of SJP, and to amend their message to the campus community
4. To demand that AEPI, in order to reinstate itself, formally and publically apologize to the Muslim Students Association and all its members as well as Palestinian and African-American students
5. To demand that AEPI, in order to reinstate itself, fund and attend an event on Islamophobia
6. To create an overarching set of guidelines defining the University's relationship to Greek Life, including policies for discipline and the expectation of annual sensitivity trainings on diversity and sexual assault

All of these demands should be executed with full transparency and student and faculty involvement. These demands shall serve as the first practical step in addressing the racist campus climate. To ignore these demands is to perpetuate the harmful culture which alienates and silences minority students, renders hate speech acceptable, and destroys any notion of inclusivity at the University of Chicago.

President Robert Zimmer has written that the University of Chicago "celebrate[s] our tradition of inclusion and recognize[s] that our success as an institution depends on its ongoing renewal." Every student in this University has the right to an educational environment that does not foster, allow, nor perpetuate a hateful climate towards any particular group of students. In order to uphold itself to the values upon which it was founded, the University of Chicago must be accountable for inadequately responding to these recent events.

When students cannot simply exist in a space without continuous harassment, hate speech, and threats of violence, it is apparent that the University of Chicago—*our* university—is failing us.

SIGNED:

Muslim Students Association
Organization of Black Students
Students for Justice in Palestine

ENDORSEMENTS:

University of Chicago Student Government
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Beta Chapter
Al-Sharq: Middle East Meets West
Calvert Circle
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Lambda Chapter
Fight for Just Food
Graduate Students United at the University of Chicago (AFT/AAUP)
Greening the Divinity School
Hindu Student Sangam

Hyde Park Pagans
Jewish Voices for Peace UChicago
J-Street UChicago
Latino Medical Student Association
The Leaders of Color Initiative
Minorities in Public Policy Studies
Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A.) de UChicago
PanAsian Solidarity Coalition
Phoenix Survivor's Alliance
Queers United In Power
Socioeconomic Diversity Alliance
Southside Solidarity Network
South Asian Students Association
Students for Health Equity
Student National Medical Association - Minority Association of Pre-Medical Students
Students Organizing and United with Labor