**UPUA Elections Questionnaire about Gender Equity**

Administrators invite student government leadership to consequential meetings and to participate in institutional-decision making. With the right leadership, student government can help student activists demand accountability and institutional change.

Sexual violence remains a pervasive cultural issue on Penn State’s University Park campus. One in five students responding to the 2018 Sexual Misconduct Survey reported experiencing some form of sexual violence. But Penn State’s leadership has failed to deliver on various commitments — like the timely release of the 2018 survey — and listen to student activists and University experts who want policy changes that would reduce the incidence of sexual violence.

We need student government leaders who will work with student activists and University experts to question administrative inaction and advocate for increased student, staff, and faculty participation in University decision-making (and by students, we don’t mean just student government members). We need student government leaders who understand the reality of sexual violence. We do not need student government leaders who buy into the self-protective form of anti-sexual-violence work that maintains the University’s image.

We encourage student participation in UPUA’s elections because your vote — or lack thereof — indicates to student government leaders and administrators what students believe. Your vote or lack thereof holds student government members accountable to the people they’re supposed to represent and advocate for: students.

To help students make an informed decision as they vote, we’re asking all candidates for the UPUA to complete the following questionnaire to inform our endorsements by **March 14th**. All questionnaires received may be published online, including candidates who were not endorsed. We will not publicize why we did not endorse any individual candidates but we may publicize why we did endorse candidates.

Responses and/or questions can be emailed to Sonika Kohli (sonika@psu.edu) as a word document. We are happy to answer candidate questions and provide feedback prior to your submission.

1. **How do you define sexual violence? How do you think sexual violence is defined by Penn State administrators and/or in institutional discourse? Is this definition inadequate and, if so, how would you leverage your role to change it?**

I would define sexual violence as any sexual act (be that groping, cat calling, harassment, forced intercourse, emotional manipulation, etc.) that is coerced or unwanted. Sexual violence is very much perpetuated by ingrained social and psychological structures that have set ideas as to how women should behave to men. This goes further of course, as individuals in the LGBTQ+ community also face sexual violence from abusive partners (who have psychological issues of their own likely, though this is not an excuse) and due to the lack of resources they generally have their plight often goes unnoticed. Finally, men may experience sexual violence because of similar psychological issues on part of the abuser and those their abuser my inflict on them as a means of control. Overall, the root causes are social norms and structures, a lack of mental health resources/counseling, lack of education on permissible relationships between humans, and a lack of an administration and student body vigilant and aware of sexual violence and its signs.

I see Penn State administrations defining sexual violence within its legal definition as an unwanted or coerced sexual act. However, due to the purely legal standpoint, the administration is likely to not do anything without the consent of *both* the survivor and perpetrator meeting (which can be traumatic and in itself and fails to consider victim’s needs) unless there is a legal restraining or court order requiring them to do so. I feel that this purely legal/policy standpoint (one which was designed to ensure the university is not sued by a student being accused of sexual misconduct) fails to provide adequate protections for the victim. Moreover, it also fails to consider the toxic social norms built around what is perceived as permissible in terms of sexual misconduct and the social structures that put certain groups at a disadvantage compared to others. Lastly, their analysis often fails to provide the perspective of male and queer victims and focuses heavily on sexual misconduct in straight scenarios (which are just as vital and important).

If elected as a UPUA representative once again, I hope to continue my current work in establishing an Ad Hoc Committee comprised of SVAP Roundtable members. I plan to have it become a body that provides recommendations to the incoming Assembly and the creation of a permanent UPUA body to deal with sexual violence and misconduct.

1. **What do you think Penn State (specifically administrators or governing bodies) or our local/state/federal government can do to decrease the incidence of sexual and relationship violence?**

Penn State can utilize its large lobbying offices at both the federal and state level to push for the numerous sexual violence and prevention bills in both the PA General Assembly and US Congress. These pieces of legislation are specifically designed to mandate reforms to Title IX and also to institute other reforms in sexual violence justice and education on campuses. Penn State can and should also formally partner with the local rape crises centers and other similar organizations to provide services to the students, and potentially integrate them in with UHS so victims can be provided better on-campus medical care. In addition, Penn State can implement mandatory and biannual sexual education and sexual assault advocacy training to further awareness on campus and foster a climate hostile to sexual violence. This can be done by using the video resources that Student Health and Wellness have and allocating a small amount of funding to assist in the production of said material. These trainings can be mandated by creating a LionPath hold that ensures students take the training. In a similar vein, PSU can make the NSO sexual violence training and proper relationship conduct training (including defining consent among other things) mandatory, as it is currently not a mandatory training (according to Student Health and Wellness). Increased advocacy and trainings have led to smaller percentages of sexual violence in states and countries that utilize them (such as the Netherlands, Rhode Island, etc.).

At a local, state, and federal level, I feel more funding to sexual violence centers in as well as comprehensive trainings and advocacy efforts in is necessary. Similarly, efforts to reform how sexual violence is responded to in law enforcement, such as ensuring universities have dedicated and fully funded sexual violence detectives and have a quota on processing sexual violence cases could diminish the higher number of backlogged cases that universities such as PSU face.

1. **Do you plan to advocate for the aforementioned changes? If so, how?**

In my opinion, successful advocacy would not only be a purely activist/protesting role, but also one that utilizes all the possible channels within Penn State to voice change. By working with entities like Faculty Senate and UPUA, resolutions can be brought to the administration on changes that we see as necessary. Furthermore, working with offices such as Gender and Equity, Student Affairs, and others can prove vital in establishing initiatives, awareness days, and in also voicing support to administrators heading those departments as to the demands of the student body regarding sexual violence reform. I feel that up until now, the main fault in the advocacy efforts to reform sexual violence are due to the lack of coordination between all the different campus groups that advocate for it. Without a centralized forum for planning and execution, the efforts are disparate, uncoordinated, and lack the ability to move administrators to act.

As a UPUA representative, I hope to advocate for these changes through the aforementioned Task Force or executive body that I hope to push towards creating. This body can recommend policies to the university via UPUA bills and resolutions, faculty senate legislation, and even through protest. Utilizing the wide network of individuals and organizations that this body intends to bring together would allow it to become an advocacy and activist group that has the ability and resources to operate both within administrative, student, and faculty channels to voice change. Furthermore, I hope to work (or become) the UPUA Borough or Federal-State Liaison and work through that position (or with whomever holds it) to advocate for these legislative changes within the State College Borough Council and the PA and Federal legislature. These individuals are specially designated to utilize the UPUA’s federal, state, and local level government contacts to support the passage of key legislation and bring in student involvement to that effort.

1. **What steps have you taken to bring anti-sexual-violence and/or social justice work into your education, workplace, and/or an organization that you have been involved with and/or personally become a better advocate?**

A few friends of mine are survivors of sexual violence in one way or another. I have had the experience to have them open up to me and eventually hold many conversations with them on their experiences. I have always acted to be a listener and a learner in that regard. Learning about their stories and what they felt helped them has helped me to become a better advocate. While I have never had to endure such an experience myself (and I hope to never do so nor wish that on anyone), I hope to utilize my knowledge of their experiences to continue to inform myself and correct any actions or past behaviors that may have been insensitive, harmful, or triggering. Furthermore, I have used this knowledge in my work within UPUA when drafting potential sexual violence reform policies to recommend to the administration and in determining which orgs to collaborate with when forming the SVAP Task Force.

1. **If elected, what organizations will you maintain relationships with? Will you start or maintain a relationship with anti-sexual violence organizations? If so, how?**

If elected, I hope to maintain or start partnerships with Gender and Equity, OSMPR, CARSVA, Gender Equity Coalition, Lotus, Lion PRIDE, QTPOC, Student Conduct, Student Affairs, and Faculty Senate to name a few. I hope to not only include them on the discussions that the Task Force will have, but also in the planning and execution of actions/demonstrations, the writing of legislation/policies, and in the planning of internal advocacy to Penn State offices and administrators. In doing so, we can maximize the voice all these bodies have and have a united voice when combatting sexual violence.

**Sponsoring Organizations**

The **Schreyer Gender Equity Coalition** is a group committed to advocating for just policies and educating students to create a more equitable Penn State. We focus on critical issues facing women, intersex, trans, and non-binary individuals — sexual violence, reproductive justice, and the intersection of marginalized identities. Learn more at geneqcoalition.org or on Instagram at @geneqcoalition.

**Lotus'** mission is to advocate and raise awareness within communities of color against acts of sexual violence. Most integral to our organization is fostering the healing of the greater collective through that of our own respective communities. We aim to engage in our goals and create a transformative environment for BIPOC students by improving policies and resources that will better accommodate the diverse needs of these collectives. Check out their Instagram at @pennstatelotus.

The **Every Voice Coalition PA** is the Pennsylvania chapter of national grassroots organization that works with Universities to pass anti-sexual violence legislation to protect students and survivors. You can learn more about the Every Voice Coalition at everyvoicecoalition.org or on Instagram @everyvoicepa.