**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 conduct in which someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent, as in line with the National Sexual Violence Resource Center’s definition (NSVRC)1. This would include sexual assault, sexual harassment, etc. In terms of Penn State’s definition, it is my understanding that Policy AD85 Title IX Sexual Harassment details the formal definitions the university uses on this topic2. While I had not seen the term “sexual violence” explicitly defined, the policy does define sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking. At least to my knowledge, seeing the lack of a definition for the term “sexual violence” would suggest one should start a conversation, with partners and the appropriate university authority, on providing one if deemed necessary.

While I have my own definition as previously described, I recognize that as a representative it is important for me to understand how other students do so as well and, in determining that appropriate definition, should communicate and coordinate with students, organizations, and other stakeholders to advocate for the definition that is most representative of what the term and its associated language should constitute. In terms of how I could leverage my role to support this, I understand UPUA serves as the voice for all undergraduate students and is a valued stakeholder in the university’s administration, as well as the Graduate Park Student Association (GPSA). I believe passing a resolution within UPUA and working with our GPSA partners could provide a united front in any advocacy efforts at the university level. Before passing a resolution, however, I would want UPUA and GPSA to collaborate with any organization in order to arrive at the best and most representative language of said resolution. These organizations would presumably include, but not be limited to the organizations invited for the Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention Roundtable like the Schreyer Gender Equity Coalition, the PRCC, Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity, Office of Student Conduct, Panhellenic and Interfraternity Councils, CentreSafe, PSU Police, etc. This official language would thereby inform the official discourse and influence the unofficial discourse on sexual violence at Penn State.

[1] <https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Factsheet_What-is-sexual-violence_1.pdf>

[2] <https://policy.psu.edu/policies/ad85>

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?**

In terms of what Penn State administrators or governing bodies can do to decrease the incidence of sexual and relationship violence, I would first recommend fulfilling the list of 18 recommended items from the President’s Task Force on Sexual Assault and Harassment from 20151. I am personally unsure the full extent to which these recommendations have been implemented as some are not student facing, but these solutions have already been identified and ought to be fully implemented. Among them, the climate survey, is a crucial part is understanding the state of the university and where we stand, which can then inform where we still have room to improve. As I understand it, the next survey will be shared in Spring 20222. In line with the Schreyer Gender Equity Coalition’s letter to university administration in the Fall, Penn State should seek student and faculty input in the compilation of questions for the survey as well as engage these partners in continuing efforts to combat sexual and relationship violence.

I believe administrators and governing bodies should consider how their approach aligns with the CDC’s Strategies for Prevention of Sexual Violence on Campus and the pillars of comprehensive prevention, infrastructure, audience, partnerships & sustainability, and evaluation3. I believe some of the key areas of this include the mobilization of more men as part of the coalition as well as the athletic program in messaging considering its immensely respected position in the university.

There is also a need to “tailor prevention to specific communities” such as immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ, disabled, and other marginalized students3. Solutions implemented ought to be diverse and inclusive in order to support these students and the greater community.

[1] <https://www.psu.edu/news/campus-life/story/task-force-report-details-recommendations-halting-sexual-misconduct/>

[2] <https://www.psu.edu/news/administration/story/2018-sexual-misconduct-survey-results-released-anticipation-2022-survey/>

[3] <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/campussvprevention.pdf>

I will address the state government aspect as that is what I am personally most familiar with and believe there is some of the most opportunity to advocate government in regards to this. Governor Wolf4 and Representative Sims5 have proposed significant legislation packages to address reporting of sexual violence, education on consent and resources, and provision of counseling and protective services for survivors. If passed, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania would be an indispensable ally in the fight against sexual violence and these bills are critical to holding educational institutions accountable and increase awareness of sexual assault on campus. I have included the below links (4 and 5) providing more details on the specifics of these pieces of legislation.

[4] <https://wskg.org/pa-governor-targets-corrosive-sexual-violence-at-colleges-universities/>

[5] <https://www.instagram.com/p/CNlkNy6h5M4/>

In terms of the federal government aspect, I would like to speak on the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). While I applaud Congress for passing its reauthorization recently6, the fact that it expired in the first place is concerning resulting in some response gaps7. VAWA improves the Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors (STOP) grant program to support responding law enforcement and require prosecutors to include best practices, significantly increases the grant funding to support domestic violence prevention and response organizations that provide victim services, reauthorizes funding for violence reduction and prevention programs, etc6. Considering the previous expiration of the legislation, I would be in favor of advocating for longer-term plans and/or expansion of resources.

[6] <https://www.capito.senate.gov/news/press-releases/capito-praises-inclusion-of_violence-against-women-act-reauthorization--in-final-appropriations-package>   
[7] <https://ncadv.org/blog/posts/yes-vawa-expired-what-this-means-how-we-got-here-and->

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

I am committed to advocating for the aforementioned changes to the best of my ability, as well as the changes others may offer and suggest. As I see it, some targets of advocacy include university (and in my case, Smeal) administration, Faculty Senate, the general student body, student organizations, and all levels of government (local, state, and federal). I understand that any successful advocacy, particularly on as encompassing and pressing issue as sexual violence, will require engagement with numerous partners and the stakeholders who can enact or support these efforts. While UPUA is historically a key advocate to university administration and can pass our resolutions within our body, I know we do not act in a vacuum. I believe partnership with fellow student organizations supports the collective effort of combatting sexual violence best rather than addressing it individually. These organizations bring their experiences from prior campaigns as well as diverse perspectives for current campaigns. Buy-in and engagement from as many students and from as many diverse backgrounds as possible demonstrates broad-based support and the enthusiasm to do something meaningful. Simply put, there is power in numbers and I believe there is still room to expand the coalition of actively engaged individuals and organizations calling for change on sexual misconduct.

Each target of advocacy operates differently, but I can help advocate for the aforementioned changes in my communications with them (whether the Office of Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response, Office of the Vice President, etc.), with UPUA leadership who have more regular meetings with these individuals, etc. In Faculty Senate, I can work with Faculty Senators and the appropriate committee, presumably student life, on legislation to support these advocacy efforts. I believe the Board of Trustees could be engaged through email, meetings, or communication with the Student Trustee. In Smeal, I can communicate with the Dean and Assistant Dean of Diversity Enhancement through email and monthly meeting on efforts any relevant efforts within Smeal. These communications require an acknowledgement of the severity of the issue (supported by the survey data) and teamwork built on respectful relationships to turn ideas into tangible policy.

Historically, UPUA’s Governmental Affairs Committee has been the primary initializer of advocacy to government. Even during my short time with UPUA, we have called on action from the President and Pennsylvania Legislature on a couple issues. I could easily see UPUA supporting the aforementioned pieces of legislation providing the voices of Penn State’s students behind them. I similarly believe UPUA’s Student Life Committee would be essential in creating legislation addressing the university’s approach.

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?**

As President of the Accounting Society, I made the decision, with the support of our Executive Board and advisor, to bring in a guest speaker from the Penn State Police Department for our General Body Meeting (GBM) following a sexual assault in the Business Building prior to my term’s start. This was not something that we would normally do – hosting a speaker during a GBM nor addressing topics outside our typical focus of professional development. However, issues as critical and substantial as the safety of students deserve the attention of all leaders, organizations, and students. Each member of the coalition knows best how to integrate the overall goal into their org and sometimes this requires new approaches compared to how things have been done. In fact, in inviting the officer we were told we were the only student organization to ever invite them for a training and presentation. This training served as an opportunity for our students to learn about reporting mechanisms, discuss sexual violence and the threats of other violence or crimes on-campus, and undergo Run-Hide-Fight training.

Even as a relatively new UPUA Representative, I have already begun work in support of Days for Girls’ advocacy and program efforts on the Flow2Go program. Specifically, I identified student poverty and period poverty as one of the most important issues that I wanted to focus on and discuss with Smeal admin in an upcoming meeting. As such, I reached out to Days for Girls to learn how their Flow2Go program had been going so I could update admin on it from a student perspective. I am now working on getting statistics on the success and usage of the program within Smeal in order to support their efforts to combat period poverty. Along these lines, as a new representative I was glad to be able to vote in favor of the UPUA’s mutual aid bill to provide students hygiene and period products anonymously through UPUA funding.

Back in Fall when I was not a Representative, I co-signed the Coalition’s letter calling on the university to be transparent and accountable to the results of the 2018 climate survey, include questions about sexual misconduct in future iterations of campus climate surveys, and seek involvement of student and faculty experts. This experience, as well as prior intimate conversations with friends and peers about their experiences, demonstrated just how much work there is to be done and the significance that work can have on real people. It is from these experiences that I have also derived an understanding of just how important it is to be a careful listener. I also recognize there is still development and growth I can do to become a better advocate and representative, but, if elected, I look forward to that growth so I can support our efforts to leave Dear Old State better than we found it.

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?**

I recognize that I do not have all of the answers on how to best tackle sexual violence which is why I would want to maintain relationships with numerous organizations and entities as I am able in order to best combat sexual violence. I, nor Penn State, cannot afford inaction. The extent and severity of the current crisis has resulted in trauma for countless students and does not support the fostering of a safe environment for student growth and development. We owe it to the survivors, current students, and future students to create the culture and university we want that responds to violence accordingly and has policies to prevent sexual and relationship violence as much as possible.

As Smeal’s Representative, I plan to be accessible and engaged with every Smeal Student organization through emails, meetings, etc. as I am able. The Representative for Smeal to UPUA also sits on Smeal Student Council. Smeal Student Council hosts required monthly Presidential Council Meetings for each Smeal Student organization; thus, I can address and converse with each organization then as well as relay any updates on events, advocacy efforts, etc.

In terms of the greater university as a whole, which I would also serve, I would want to be more active in my relationship with the Schreyer Gender Equity Coalition through similar emails, meetings, etc. I would also want to maintain my relationship with Days for Girls from the Flow2Go Program in working to get data from Smeal on the program’s statistics for their advocacy. I would similarly want to work in conjunction with them on other programs or advocacy as well. There are numerous other organizations that I believe would support a symbiotic relationship in addressing sexual violence as well.

Something I have already done is create a feedback form, available in my Instagram bio and shared with every Smeal org, that any student can reach out to me about suggestions, concerns, comments, etc. on anything. I would plan to continue to advertise this and reach out to more students and student orgs in order to be as accessible as possible.

**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.