**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?**

Sexual violence is violence committed through sexual acts which results in physical or mental harm to someone. It is, in my understanding, the more extreme form of sexual harassment and misconduct. I believe Penn State administrators do not differentiate between violence, harassment, and misconduct, which can and has serious negative consequences, such as sexual violence being overlooked or innocent people being falsely accused and punished. As for tackling this issue, there needs to be more stringent investigation into reports of sexual harassment which can sort out false accusations from real ones, and there needs to be harsher and quicker repercussions for the guilty. But most importantly, there must be balance between the constitutional presumption of innocence and the protection and consolation of the victim.

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?**

Governing bodies can promote a culture of accountability for people who commit sexual assault/violence, as well as severe repercussions for those who falsely accuse people of sexual assault/violence so that actual victims can recieve the help they need, and offenders can be punished for the severity of their crimes. Innocent lives should not be ruined forever because of the decisions of individuals seeking to harm.

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

In my opinion, I do not have the qualifications to advocate on this particular topic. I will, however, support my peers who put forth proposals that I find agreeable in tackling this issue. I am fully willing to commit to campaigns fighting for such changes, both within UPUA and outside of it.

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?**

I do not tolerate any sexual conduct which makes people around me uncomfortable, and I try to intervene whenever possible before the situation gets out of hand. If I learn of any sexual misconduct, harassment, or violence occurring to people I know or am in social proximity to, I offer help to those affected such as consolation, reporting it to authorities, and suggesting resources to help them such as counseling.

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?**

As a member of the Forestry program at Penn State, I want to expand the relationship of UPUA with groups like the Penn State Forestry Society. I also look forward to forming relationships with student organizations that have less representation in UPUA and bringing their concerns to UPUA for discussion and action.

**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.