

Statement of Concern

Compiled by “**The Movement**” a Lehigh University Student-Led Group
To promote diversity, acceptance, and understanding within the Lehigh community

We are writing to you as a student-led group that represents a wide range of interests on Lehigh’s campus, including athletics, Greek life, the Women’s Center, the Brown & White, the Asian Cultural Club, the National Society of Black Engineers, and many others. Our goal is to establish an environment where all students, faculty, and staff can feel welcome to express their individuality in a safe community atmosphere by promoting diversity, acceptance, and understanding within the Lehigh community. A series of hate crime incidents have occurred on Lehigh’s campus which have brought light to the segregation, racism and homophobia that many students experience both *subtly and explicitly* on a daily basis. Critical action to address and change the crisis plaguing our campus is more than overdue. We feel that it is time that the administration, with support from students, takes a leading role to both increase diversity and to demand respect for the community’s differences.

The following are excerpts of statements that were submitted to us in regards to issues of diversity on Lehigh’s campus. They reflect the feelings, concerns and experiences of many students on Lehigh’s campus. Through quotes and personal testimonies, we hope to leave you with an understanding of the sources of our concern and urgency. We trust that you will read and consider these personal statements, empathize with our concern and work with us to eliminate the present destructive atmosphere on Lehigh’s campus.

“College is a multidimensional experience. However, education only accounts for a fraction of what can be learned during these influential four years. Friendships and relationships with our peers make up the unquantifiable part of our experience. While our education may be rich in sciences, business, and the humanities, our campus lacks the diversity necessary for the less tangible aspects of our college career to be equally as fulfilling... I have spent the past three and a half years surrounded by the same kind of people and ideas that I had at home. If we are truly to make Lehigh University multi-dimensional both academically and socially then it is imperative that the issue of campus diversity be addressed immediately.”

“Discovering that Lehigh University is currently ranked #18 LEAST DIVERSE university by the US News and World Report, though not completely surprising, was deeply saddening for me as a member of the Lehigh community. Furthermore, as a white, Christian female, I continued to realize the prevalence of “white privilege” in American society and most certainly at Lehigh. I feel that Lehigh allows its students to be lazy in terms of reducing prejudice and diminishing hateful discrimination on its campus... It is not simply a nice idea to have an equal and diverse Lehigh society, it is a NECESSITY. Now, I am a realist in the sense that no one thing is going to turn racists around in a day and make them love everyone. BUT, I do believe that these issues need to at least be raised to the community as a whole, because honestly, there may be some people that are truly not aware of the discrimination that permeates our small school.”

“A very pertinent topic of concern is the atmosphere bred by most of the fraternities on our campus. It is depressing enough that the main form of entertainment on this campus is going up on the hill and being witness to the belligerence and outright vulgarity that constitutes its atmosphere every weekend. On the occasion last year that I would go up with a few Caucasian friends, I occasionally witnessed how my friends were let in to a house and I was left out. Additionally, in several instances that I could go in I was confronted with stares and apprehension, as if the people there wanted to say: “Where did he come from?” It is due to these instances, and others, that I have only been on the hill a maximum of one to two times since first semester of my freshman year, and on the occasions that I have returned I have been reminded why I stopped going in the first place.”

“As a senior, I have seen over the past four years that an “ideal” climate does not exist. Instead what we have here at Lehigh is an extremely disparate and segregated campus, predominantly comprised of Greeks and non-Greeks. As a proud, active member of Lehigh’s Greek community, it has been extremely frustrating, upsetting and sickening at times to see how homogenous the fraternities and sororities tend to be, with only a handful of minorities involved in these organizations. Not only are they homogenous in appearance, but these organizations have put up barriers which shut out diverse students from even being remotely interested in joining, through their ignorance, intolerance and biases towards other races, ethnicities, etc. In many conversations with my peers, I have repeatedly heard fraternity and sorority members angrily talking about why the Umoja House was established in such a “prime” location on the Hill and argue that such a space would have better use as a Greek residence. This is only one example of how close-mindedness and prejudice permeate the entire campus, and especially those involved in Greek life.”

“A diverse academic environment is essential to creating better citizens who are better prepared, both professionally and personally, to live in the contemporary globalized world.”

“Unfortunately, I have begun to notice that Lehigh is growing into a campus with a deleterious environment for students, where the interaction between white students and minorities, more specifically black students, is disappearing at a quickening pace. The disintegration has separated the students at Lehigh and more severely, it has created a place where white students, the majority, have begun to feel comfortable (due to numbers) with racial tendencies, varying from verbal or written epithets to physical violence. The problem of racism on campus has moved out from behind the doors of fraternities and dorm rooms. The problem of racism has moved out from the once shy, naïve, confused students who set foot on this campus as freshman and it has shown itself in the actions of the students on this campus. These acts have gone undetected and unmentioned by the administration, by the student body and by the community as a whole and this neglect is creating an ugly, racially charged setting here at Lehigh... If we, as an institution, prepare our students to move out into the real world and place them at prestigious jobs in hopes that they one day become CEO’s or pundits in their areas of expertise then are we, at the same time, willing to assume full responsibility to sending out students who have, for the last four years of their life, felt not only comfortable but justified in their beliefs and actions to be racist at this university? This is a question that

must be confronted, discussed and dealt with immediately and I ask, politely, if you are ready because we are.”

The above statements are not isolated experiences. Rather, they reflect the multitude of experiences, views, and opinions students on Lehigh’s campus have shared with The Movement. We are deeply concerned. We are concerned that students are not being held accountable for their destructive actions. We are concerned that students are not being challenged or urged to think critically about the community around them. We are concerned that individuals are not having a fulfilling and positive college experience. We are concerned that we, as an institution, are not providing the educational or social opportunities necessary to prepare students to enter the workforce. This is detrimental to us all as individuals, as well as a community, and an institution in the eyes of our country.

We ask that you acknowledge the hate incidents and harmful atmosphere on Lehigh’s campus. We ask that you recognize our concerns and want an official meeting set up with the administration to discuss these matters in more detail. Thank you in advance for your cooperation, we look forward to hearing from you

For further correspondence, please contact the editors of this statement: Sarah Jefferson (ssj3), Devin Dobson (dtd3), and Nayla Raad (nrr2).

Sincerely,
The Movement at Lehigh