

PRINCETON ADMINISTRATION STONEWALLS NEGOTIATIONS WITH SOLIDARITY ENCAMPMENT

Princeton, New Jersey, May 11

Two weeks into the Princeton Gaza Solidarity Encampment and one week into a student-led hunger strike, Princeton administrators have stonewalled negotiations with representatives of the encampment on their demands for divestment. Instead of making tangible commitments, administrators backpedaled on opening negotiations and merely directed representatives to existing institutional processes, which protestors say disregards the urgency of the genocide in Gaza. The encampment's demands are financial divestment, military divestment, an academic and cultural boycott of Israel, cultivating Palestinian affiliations, ending the silence on genocide in Gaza, and amnesty for encampment participants.

Representatives from the encampment, including undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and faculty, first reached out to administrators on April 25 to negotiate on the encampment's demands. After continued pressure by the encampment and the start of the hunger strike, Eisgruber held a meeting on May 6 with representatives, where he emphasized the importance of campus consensus—which he could not define—and existing processes. He refused to meet again, but directed representatives to a team of administrators. In a meeting on May 8 with encampment representatives, four senior administrators stated that they would be negotiators, agreeing to meet the next day due to the urgency of the hunger strike and to meet again on May 10 to negotiate a formal agreement. They welcomed the precedent set by negotiations with the Black Justice League in 2015, a movement that included direct action and resulted in a signed agreement for institutional change.

However, on Thursday, May 9, the same four administrators backpedaled on their intention to negotiate. In contrast to the prior Wednesday meeting, they argued that institutional policies and practices have changed since the Black Justice League sit-in that prevent the circumvention of existing processes. They also shifted from expressing urgency at resolving the hunger strike to saying that they hoped the hunger strikers would make good personal choices for their health, but that they were not responsible for resolving the hunger strike. The four administrators maintained their refusal to negotiate at a final meeting on May 10, despite reminders of their previous statements. The commitments made at the May 8 meeting, then, were entirely misleading.

“On Wednesday, when I asked the administrators to clarify their role, they said that they would be the negotiators at the table,” said Jessica Ng, a postdoctoral scholar representative. “Then on Thursday, three hours before our next meeting, they wrote to say they wouldn’t be negotiating after all. We can only speculate what happened between now and then, but it was a total turnaround in tone and intention.”

Throughout these meetings, the university has refused to acknowledge the gravity of the genocide in Gaza, with Eisgruber questioning even the characterization of Israel as an apartheid state. Emanuelle Sippy, an undergraduate student representative, pointed out, “Eisgruber has decided that some historical crises warranted a statement, such as October 7 and the beginning of the war in Ukraine. I find it morally bankrupt that the university cannot acknowledge the immense devastation and loss of Palestinian life.”

Despite the administrators’ emphasis on existing processes, Eisgruber has blocked avenues for due process. In advance of an all-university faculty meeting requested by faculty and scheduled for May 20, Eisgruber excluded all proposed motions pertaining to military investments, divestment, and cultivating ties to Palestinian academic institutions, only allowing a single motion regarding student disciplinary action. In a clear instance of using policy and predilection of process to block dialogue at this critical juncture, Eisgruber postponed the faculty’s divestment proposals to the fall. This procedural delay stonewalls the efforts of faculty and the encampment at large.

Students launched the encampment on Thursday, April 25 when protestors pitched tents in the McCosh Courtyard. Two students were immediately arrested, and the tents were taken down under threat of further arrests. Princeton students, affiliates, and community members continued to protest through nonviolent direct action, including [a sit-in at Clio Hall](#) that was met with increased police presence and arrests and [an undergraduate-led hunger strike](#) that the administration has largely ignored. In the meantime, Princeton’s Popular University for Gaza has persisted through [rain and police threats](#) in unflinching solidarity with Palestine.

The administration’s refusal to negotiate is not a loss for the Palestinian liberation movement at Princeton, but a failure of the university to take seriously its purported responsibility to serve humanity. Disingenuous gestures toward negotiations and deliberate tactics of delay demonstrate a staggering lack of moral clarity and a commitment to financial profit over human life. The students and the community at Princeton have played a pivotal role in an unprecedented national movement for Palestine, while Eisgruber and his administration have chosen the wrong side of history. Princeton encampment representatives say they are undeterred.

“We got the administration to engage with the groundswell of support for Palestine,” said Givarra Azhar Abdullah, an undergraduate student representative. “We saw tensions within the institution. They’re paying attention to our protest and they’re worried. The students are steadfast, creative, and energized.”

The encampment cannot disclose its next steps, but the long history of anti-war movements and decolonial struggles has taught students that they must push beyond existing institutional processes. As Israel continues its invasion of Rafah and blocks lifesaving aid from Gaza, the

Palestinian liberation movement at Princeton vows to continue to increase pressure on the university and remains committed to its demands.