

January 30, 2021

Carleton University Administration,

Benoit-Antoine Bacon (*President*),
Suzanne Blanchard (*VP / Student Affairs/Enrollment*),
Michael F. Charles (*VP / Equity and inclusion*),
Melanie Chapman (*Ombudsperson*),
Sandra Slater (*Executive Assistant to the President*)

Subject: Call to Action Re: Slanderous Online Behaviour Through the CUSA Election

TW: Mention of suicide and homophobia

This is not politics as usual. This election season has not gone how any of us have hoped it to go. Since the beginning, there has been nothing but an endless spiral of negativity coming from anonymous sources onto social media. This has created an environment full of hate and toxicity around the CUSA elections, which has been detrimental to the mental and physical well being of many Candidates, as well as credibility of democracy itself. This process is supposed to surround the positive aspects of our respective campaigns, the vision that each of us have for our campus, not rumours, gossip, and hate. Those of us involved in this election are physically and mentally exhausted having to be glued to our phones waiting for the next negative comment to come upon our feeds. The behaviour that we have seen by anonymous sources on social media is repulsive and needs to be put to an end, not only for due process but as well for our students's well being.

As a whole, Carleton's online community is as hostile as it has ever been, and these incidents must be condemned. The University needs to step up and ensure that student's mental health and wellness is at the forefront, and individuals responsible need to be held fully accountable. If the election was occurring on campus, the university would have already taken action; why is it any different due to the online nature of the campaign? Just because we are not physically on campus this year, it does not mean that the University can ignore our needs. Rather, there should be a greater focus from the Administration to protect and ensure the Carleton online community is a safe space for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has already taken a considerable toll on the wellbeing of students, and the lack of acknowledgement of this from the University is upsetting. According to a recent audit of StudentCare's insurance claims, \$358,000 worth of mental health claims have been issued to students this year. This proves the gravity of the situation and the fact that action must be taken in this situation from Administration, before more students are put at risk.

As mentioned in the Positive Politics statement released by the Chief Electoral Officer, "Candidates and Students should still adhere to respectful and responsible conduct, as per The Carleton University Human Rights Policies And Procedures, and overall, treat others as they wish to be treated." This has not occurred within the election. The slanderous

posts and comments made online range from general disrespect and disregard for the feelings of candidates, to homophobia and sexism. These issues of hate speech and malicious behaviour in our online community is bigger than this election. This is about taking a stand against what's right and what's wrong; ensuring that our community remains strong and supported. The range of issues is wide, and a direct demonstration of the lack of regard for the wellbeing of candidates. Throughout the electoral process constructive criticism is encouraged and an essential part of the process, when that crosses the line to become bullying and hate speech, action needs to be taken. There was hate speech directed towards a candidate in regards to sexual orientation, which is unacceptable and needs to be handled, and consequences need to be assigned to the individuals responsible. As well, many candidates have been disrespected in both private messages and public forums, which is unacceptable and must also be investigated. This needs to be put to a stop, and student leaders are urging the university to intervene in this issue. We cannot let those hide behind malice and hate speech disguised in the name of conversation and debate. Enough is enough.

Call to Action

We have come to the conclusion that the situation around slander and negativity in this campaign has come to a breaking point. As candidates who are concerned about ourselves and our peers, we are calling on the University administration and Campus Security to take action against this harassment. We demand that there are actions taken by the University to ensure that nobody is put in a position in which they put themselves or others at risk due to slanderous activity online. Our demands for action are as follow:

1. That the University have all anonymous accounts regarding the election taken down, and that all that are posting slanderous content, or anything that may be considered bullying have disciplinary action taken against them.

2. That all posts, comments, videos, etc., on forums such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, and any and all other social media platforms regarding candidates that are hateful and disrespectful be immediately investigated & acted upon.

3. That if the identities of any students who have posted slanderous content are discovered, that the University takes disciplinary actions in order to maintain a positive campus environment, and they be held to the full account of Carleton's Human Rights Policy.

4. That Carleton University provides extended mental health and wellness resources for any individuals struggling during these extremely difficult times.

Possible Next Steps

We urge that in future elections, there are considerations taken to ensure that these issues never happen again, and they are as follow:

1. That Anti-Bias/Bullying Training be incorporated into Elections Workshops as mandatory sessions for all candidates.

2. That the Electoral Code has codified policy protecting the mental health and wellness of candidates. Also, policies that regard student-at-large decorum and enforce disciplinary action taken against slanderous commenters, cyberbullying, and hate speech.

This Call to Action and possible solutions stem from a place of concern for our peers and a hope to improve the political and social climate of Carleton University for future student leaders. Elections are supposed to be a time of change and fresh ideas. The negativity and harassment stemming from Social Media throughout the process thus far are repulsive, and need to be dealt with by a higher power. A student's life was almost lost due to the hatred seen online over the course of this election, it has to end now. As shown by the support on this Call to Action, this is a problem that affects not only candidates, but our student body as a whole. This is an issue that many student leaders believe needs resolution, before it's too late. This issue is bigger than CUSA; it is an epidemic of negativity and hatred that needs to be handled. Negativity and hatred that has found a home in our Community. We the signatories below call upon the University to say no more, and show us that hate has no place at Carleton.

Sincerely,

Emily Sowa and Jordan Vecchio

Emily Sowa and Jordan Vecchio, CUSA Councillors

Kathleen Weary

Kathleen Weary, CUSA President

Morgan McKeen

Morgan McKeen, CUSA VPCE

Jaden Slawter

Jaden Slawter, RRRA President

Matt Gagné

Matt Gagné, CASG President

Hamza Al-Khateeb

Hamza Al-Khateeb, CUSA

Councillor

Nicolas Gil

Nicolas Gil, CUSA Councillor

Liam Lowe

Liam Lowe, CUSA Councillor

Paige Arsenault

Paige Arsenault, Candidate

Keenan Reynolds

Keenan Reynolds, Candidate

Gray Simms

Gray Simms, Candidate

Farook Al-Muflehi

Farook Al-Muflehi, CUSA VPI

Tinu Akinwande

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Jenna Smith

Jenna Smith, RRRA VPP

Pierce Burch

Pierce Burch, CASG VPA

Musab Chaudhry

Musab Chaudhry, CUSA

Councillor

Sara Harvey

Sara Harvey, CUSA Councillor

Emma Rowsell

Emma Rowsell, CUSA Councillor

Kareem Al-Wazir

Kareem Al-Wazir, Candidate

Christian Wright

Christian Wright, Candidate

Ibrahim Dokhan

Ibrahim Dokhan, Candidate

Jacob Howell

Jacob Howell, CUSA VPF

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Mackenzie Huckvale

Mackenzie Huckvale, CUSA

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Noor Massad

Noor Massad, CUSA Councillor

Venassa Baptiste

Venassa Baptiste, Candidate

Sam Morency

Sam Morency, Candidate

Lily Huang

Lily Huang, Candidate

Jasmine Doobay-Joseph

Jasmine Doobay-Joseph,
Candidate

Diya Kulkarni

Diya Kulkarni, Candidate

Liam Clarke

Liam Clarke, Candidate

Francesca Lepore

Francesca Lepore, Candidate

Gauri Bhardwaj

Gauri Bhardwaj, Candidate

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Waqas Ali, Candidate

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James McKenna, Candidate

Baher Mansour

Baher Mansour, Candidate

Callie Ogden

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Valentina González

Valentina González, Candidate

David Noonan

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Myia Loback

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Ahmad Hashimi

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Anthony Valenti

Anthony Valenti, Candidate

Kevin Caswell

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Sami Islam

Sami Islam, Candidate

Rawan Abdou

Rawan Abdou, Candidate

Alexis St.Pierre

Alexis St.Pierre, Candidate

Ahmad Ali Mohammad

Ahmad Ali Mohammad,
Candidate

Hiwan Bayru

Hiwan Bayru, Candidate

Saleh Hesham

Saleh Hesham, CUSA Councillor

Emilia Perez

Emilia Perez, Candidate

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AnuShree Patak, Candidate

Hibrahima Dieng

Hibrahima Dieng, Candidate

Nora Draper

Nora Draper, Candidate

Greg Dance

Greg Dance, Candidate

Grant Wilson

Grant Wilson, Candidate

Michael Isa

Michael Isa, Candidate

Sydney Holley

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Ahmed Kataite

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