

STUDENT CENTRICITY REFORM PROPOSAL

“Stevens now and in the future will be a vibrant, respectful and socially-responsible community of faculty, students and administration.”

In the past four years alone, the Stevens community has tackled the above promise from our Strategic Plan through improving mental and physical health, establishing student-centric and intercultural spaces, and ensuring the acceptance of many spectrums of identity. These efforts have been led by students during the most challenging years of their young lives – both inside and outside of the classroom. They have been told time and time again that, if they work hard on campus, these landmarks can be achieved over time in order to bring our campus, together, into the 21st century.

We are here today because students feel that the administration has fallen short. "Stigma-Free Campus" signs sit across from empty dorm halls where students took their own lives. "Take Back the Night" Events were hosted without a dedicated Title IX coordinator. Diversity Admission statistics are published while denying students of color the intercultural center they asked for. The consequences of these failures range from everyday inconvenience to a lack of a tolerant campus culture.

We have chosen this moment – that is, the honoring of an individual who actively fights against LGBTQ non-discrimination ordinances, contributes financially to hate groups, and denies the very real future of climate change – because this tangible acceptance of Mr. Gianforte and what he stands for is the most damning assault carried out by an administration onto the community it promises to serve.

As students, alumni, staff, and concerned citizens of Hoboken, we have come together in an effort to regain our power and propose substantial reform in the areas of student wellness, administrative transparency, and the campus climate. It is because we recognize the potential of Stevens Institute of Technology that we can criticize its foundation and engineer structural change. We can no longer negotiate our agency. We are ready to carry the torch, and we are not afraid to confront those standing in its way.

We will not sit by.

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1) Preface

In the following pages, members of the Stevens community have collaborated to document the efforts of students to promote a healthy, vibrant, and inclusive campus culture, and the administrative shortcomings of each. We have categorized these into three dominant issues, documenting a pervasive pattern of inaction:

- **Student Wellness**, *encompassing the physical and mental well-being of the student body*
- **Administrative Transparency**, *denoting decisions of those in power affecting the student body without explicit and unambiguous consultation of the student body*
- **Campus Culture**, *covering the common attitudes, values, and behaviors shared among students, faculty, staff, and administration.*

We then propose several courses of action. Though not all-encompassing, they must serve as direction for student meetings with the administration in order to create meaningful reform, together.

2) Student Wellness

“To inspire, nurture and educate leaders in tomorrow’s technology-centric environment while contributing to the solution of the most challenging problems of our time” [1].

[1] <https://www.stevens.edu/about-stevens/mission>

a) **Mental Health Initiatives**

i) **The President’s Task Force on Mental Health**

The open discussion of mental health on college campuses has taken on a tone of urgency in recent years, and Stevens is no exception.

In an email sent out in April 2019, Stevens announced that it had been the recipient of a JED seal, an organization devoted to “protect emotional health and prevent suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults” [1]. However, the other recipients of the JED seal include universities with some of the highest suicide rates on college campuses in the United States. [2] [3] [4]

In the same email, Stevens announced a plan with the seven objectives of:

- “(1) Promote Social Connectedness - No Duck Left Behind
- (2) Identify Students at Risk - Weave a Tighter Safety Net
- (3) Increase Help-Seeking Behavior - Make Seeking Help Our Strength
- (4) Provide Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services – Extend More Helping Hands
- (5) Follow Crisis Management Procedures
- (6) Restrict Access to Potentially Lethal Means – Install Impulsivity Speed Bumps
- (7) Develop Life Skills – Teach Our Ducks to Swim”

On July 9th, 2019, President Nariman Farvardin announced that he had chosen to pursue these objectives by appointing and announcing the members of the President’s Task Force on Mental Health, of which 3 of its 25 members were students at the time. The committee planned to meet four times during the 2019-2020 Academic Year. Of the promised four meetings, as of December 10th, 2019, two have occurred. Neither the initiatives nor the actions proposed or discussed at these meetings have been made available to the Stevens community.

On a campus where students have historically struggled with mental wellness, administration withholding all information of any mental health initiative progress is a direct affront to the proposed reformation of mental health at Stevens. There has been no public reassessment of the accessibility of CAPS and its resources since this campaign has begun. Since CAPS is the only resource on campus singularly devoted

to students accessing mental health resources, it is abhorrent that there have been no public assessments on its efficacy since Farvardin's initial announcement.

[1] <https://www.jedfoundation.org/>

[2] <https://www.sprc.org/system/files/private/event-training/CPlenary%20Comprehensive%20Approach%20Plenary%20Roy.pdf>

[3] <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/03/16/suicide-rate-mit-higher-than-national-average/1aGWr7IRjiEyhoD1WIT78I/story.html>

[4] <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/rising-suicide-rates-college-campuses-prompt-concerns-mental/story?id=66126446>

ii) The CARE Team

The Stevens CARE Team's focus is

“Raising the awareness of the community to know when a student needs help. Educating the community to know what action to take when a student needs help. Responding to a student in need in a way that is attentive to the safety and needs of the whole community and provides maximum support for the student you are concerned about.” [1]

Another initiative which has not been updated publicly since its inception is the CARE Team. Meant to act as a preventative, measure for mental health crises on campus, it has fallen short. The anonymous nature of the CARE team makes it difficult to track its efficacy and accountability. Due to the anonymity of the CARE team reports, it is difficult to know if students who had later taken their lives had been reported to the CARE team, and if their cases were addressed in the first place. A system like the CARE team can be helpful, but with no student input, it can do more harm than good.

[1] <https://my.stevens.edu/careteam>

b) Physical Health

i) Smoking

Stevens Campus has taken very few steps in ensuring the health and comfort of nonsmoking students. As it currently stands in the Stevens Student Handbook (2019-2020), this is the sole policy mentioned:

“Smoking is prohibited within 25 feet of all campus buildings, including but not limited to individual offices and rooms; athletic and sporting facilities; spectator areas at outdoor university events; university-owned vehicles; shuttle buses and vans; dining facilities, theaters and concert halls; partially enclosed areas, such as archways, weather-protected ramps and tents; and outdoor dining areas.” [1]

The policy has gone unenforced, being that there are no clear consequences to hold community members to if they violate this policy.

On October 22, 2017, the Student Government Association passed proclamation P-17F-003, *Recommendation of the Establishment of a Formal Smoking Policy*. Since then, there have been no actions taken by the administration to create a policy, nor enforce the sole policy we already have.

[1]

<https://stevens-institute-of-technology.dcatalog.com/v/Student-Handbook?page=26>

ii) STI Testing

Stevens administration began holding LGBTQ Townhalls in Spring 2019. At the Townhall, STI testing was discussed and students were told progress was being made. [1] Stevens has been historically behind other US colleges in offering STI testing to its students. [2] [3] [4] Students were additionally told that, with the opening of the Wellness Center, STI testing would be offered. Stevens Administration have rejected multiple attempts from students to bring testing to campus, and have not shown or followed up with any progress. [5]

[1] <https://thetute.com/2019/03/01/student-leaders-hold-lgbtq-summit-with-student-affairs/>

[2] <https://uhs.umich.edu/stiassess>

[3] <https://health.columbia.edu/services/sexually-transmitted-infections-sti-testing>

[4] <https://www.uhs.uga.edu/sexualhealth/sti-testing>

[5] <https://thetute.com/2019/11/08/on-campus-sti-testing-cancelled/>

iii) Gender-Neutral Restrooms

Proclamation P-17F-004 of the 104th Senate of the SGA stated that there were “many current bathrooms on campus which meet the Stevens mold for ‘Gender-Inclusive Bathrooms’ (that they be single-stall and lockable) and many more which could be transformed with minimally-invasive construction”. This proclamation was passed in Fall 2017. Additionally, the document listed the bathrooms’ locations, sorting them by priority based on traffic and ease of signage change. Some of the high-priority restrooms have not been converted to gender-inclusive restrooms, some of which are the only single-stall, lockable restrooms available within the complex. As of Fall 2019, based on a physical survey by this proposal’s authors, there are still 22 single-stall restrooms that have not been converted to gender-neutral restrooms.

3) Administrative Transparency

[1] p. 8 “Honor, integrity and accountability will define us. We will be committed to a governance and organizational structure that is efficient, effective, and transparent.”

Stevens Strategic Plan

“As a university which pledges to ‘honor, integrity, accountability, transparency’ [1], Many administrative decisions that have been made behind closed doors illustrate the opposite.

a) Stevens Hack

At the end of Summer Session II, just weeks prior to the fall semester, students were caught off guard by a cyber attack that took down all essential Stevens systems. [1] Stevens has still not fully recovered and no timeline has been made public to students as to what happened, or what will happen.

Stevens students feel overwhelmingly that the way the hack is being handled is a disservice to them as students, soon to be working professionals, and funders of this institution. [2]

[1]

<https://thestute.com/2019/09/13/major-cyberattack-shuts-down-stevens-for-weeks/>

[2]

https://www.reddit.com/r/stevens/comments/cscyv/an_open_letter_to_stevens_institute_of_technology/

b) The Gianforte Naming: Conflict of Interest in Financial Contributions to Gianforte Campaign

According to filings submitted to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), Stevens President Nariman Farvardin, Virginia P. Rueterholz, Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees, Lawrence T. Babbio, Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Trustees, and Board of Trustee members Philip Crowley, John Hanlon, Thomas Scholl, Stephen Boswell, and Frank J. Semcer, have all made monetary contributions to Gianforte’s congressional election committee, “Greg For Montana.” The contributions are dated past the initial center-naming announcement made by Farvardin in December 2016. These individuals collectively oversee the financial, administrative, and academic affairs of Stevens. [1] They also made the decision to name the then-Gianforte Family Complex based on the results of the committee appointed to reevaluate the naming of the Academic Complex. This renders President Farvardin and Virginia Rueterholz’s initial reasoning for establishing the committee, that re-naming the center must be approached “in a thoughtful... objective manner,” a farce.

[1] <https://thestute.com/2017/10/13/stevens-president-multiple-members-of-the-board-of-trustees-made-contributions-to-gianfortes-political-campaign/>

c) The Gianforte Naming: Board of Trustee's Misuse of an Overturned Yale Decision

The *Gianforte Family Hall* shares the name of the Gianfortes' charitable foundation, the Gianforte Family Foundation, which has an agenda that is, as the BoT's statement following the renaming frames it, "socially conservative." This presumably covers the Gianforte Family Foundation's donations to organizations that support gay conversion therapy and oppose equal rights for LGBTQ people (their philanthropy in this case shows itself to be actually political and strategic). The statement also mentions that the building's – now hall's – new name also honors Greg Gianforte's wife and business partner Susan Gianforte. Public IRS records [1] show that the Gianforte Family Foundation names both Greg Gianforte and Susan Gianforte as trustees, demonstrating Mrs. Gianforte as an active voice in deciding who benefits from the foundations' various donations.

Additionally, The BoT's statement bases its reasoning on an interpretation of the concept of "principal legacy," cited from a report produced by a committee at Yale regarding the naming of the then-Calhoun College. The college honored John C. Calhoun, an alumnus who advocated ardently for slavery and white supremacy [2]. An unfortunately relevant connection to Calhoun is that both Mr. and Mrs. Gianforte have contributed to white supremacists Taylor Rose and Robert Saunders in 2015 and 2016, respectively. [3] The college's name was then changed from Calhoun College to honor Grace Murray Hopper. [4] This was announced by Yale President Peter Salovey in February 2017. In September 2017, the BoT interpreted the initial Yale report – a document that eventually guided the *renaming* of the Calhoun College – as reasoning to in fact *keep* the Gianforte name. [5]

Because the justification for the Gianforte Family naming is flawed in a myriad of ways, we must discard it.

[1] <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/306089834>

[2] https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf

[3] https://missoulain.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/gianforte-on-donating-to-suspected-white-nationalist-i-was-unaware/article_fc11afb9-518a-5f98-b637-5dc08c3a51b2.html

[4] <https://news.yale.edu/2017/02/11/yale-change-calhoun-college-s-name-honor-grace-murray-hopper-0>

[5] <https://www.stevens.edu/sites/stevens.edu/files/BOT/Announcement%2009-28-17%20Naming%20of%20the%20Gianforte%20Academic%20Center.pdf>

4) Campus Climate

“Stevens is committed to equality of opportunity and creating a campus climate that supports, nurtures and rewards educational and career advancement on the basis of ability and performance.”

In creating, and upholding, an enriching campus climate for its students, the Institute must ask itself in what ways they pursue retention on campus, how effective are these resources, and how they understand these resources beyond numerical value.

a) Student-Centric Spaces

i) Intercultural Space

The Intercultural Space was created in response to an “Intercultural Center Initiative” pursued by the Diversity & Inclusion Committee of the Student Government Association. After collecting almost a third of the Undergraduate Student Body’s approval and crafting a 25-page proclamation titled “A Case and Justification on the Intercultural Center” [1], the space was approved. However, there are key issues that arose during the process and continue to plague the aftermath.

Stevens Administration heavily relied on this data and tasked its very own community members to collect it. The collection of this data required hundreds of man-hours gathering feedback from other students. The Committee had to ask the majority of campus to “approve” a Center meant for the empowerment of underrepresented students. As of Fall 2019, the total of all underrepresented minority groups on campus is a mere 14.2%. [2]. And after gathering these, placing them within the Proclamation and the request being passed, the “Intercultural Space” that was granted virtually stripped the most important elements advocated for in the Proclamation.

Though the Space is a step for a more inclusive Stevens, it falls short on delivering the resources students had initially asked and advocated for. Stevens Administration must realize that their entire campus cannot operate based on purely quantitative data, and that the journeys and needs of their students are equally as important as statistics. Stevens administration must realize that at the core of these initiatives are *students*, who are utilizing unpaid time and putting themselves at risk for the betterment of their campus.

[1] <https://ducklink.stevens.edu/organization/student-government-association/documents/view/1068813>

[2] <https://www.stevens.edu/about-stevens/facts-statistics>

ii) Prayer Space

For individuals who practice prayer, surroundings are key, and a secluded place free of judgement and noise offers the best ways to pray outside of the comfort of one's own home or religious institution. There are four religious organizations on this campus: Stevens Hillel, Stevens Christian Fellowship, Newman Catholic Association and Muslim Education & Cultural Association. In the former student center, Jacobus, the Newman/MECA storage room was designated as a prayer space. With the building gone, there is no room left specifically dedicated to faith or religious-based organizations. Since the loss of Jacobus (during which there were efforts to create an official space), efforts ramped up to create a formal space on campus. Proclamation P-19S-001 "A Case and Justification on the Intercultural Center" called for a prayer space [1], with specific testimonials asking for one to be created. Many students were hoping that the Intercultural Space, or at the very least, Alexander House, now referred to as the Student Center, would house some sort of room for prayer. Instead, the Space was scaled down, and no new plans have been made for a space. Sara Klein, Vice President of Student Affairs, says the following:

"While the administration recognizes that some students may want to pray or meditate while on campus, there are many competing needs for space, and at this time an appropriate space has not been found. We may revisit this issue in the future as new space comes on line." [2]

[1] <https://ducklink.stevens.edu/organization/student-government-association/documents/view/1068813>

[2] <https://thetute.com/2019/12/06/efforts-to-establish-a-prayer-space-at-stevens/>

b) Campus Resources

i) Diversity Education

In Fall 2016, Stevens made a stride for its underrepresented community with the creation of Diversity Education. The office's goals are outlined as "foster[ing] deeper understandings of equity and inclusion," "cultivat[ing] safe(r) spaces for all community members," and "empoweri[ng] Stevens students, faculty, and staff" - all progress that was lost in the gap without a Diversity Educator. In the period from August 2018 to March 2019, the Stevens campus failed to support underrepresented community members, highlight heritage, and fulfill campus-wide trainings. Additionally, Student Affairs found itself involved in a scandal around controversial voting posters that targeted minorities in October 2018, which caused a student-led push on diversity initiatives [1].

As of now, Diversity Education oversees two campus spaces (the Lore-EI Center for Women's Leadership and the Intercultural Space), a lending library, campus-wide

training, heritage months and awareness weeks, and must respond to bias incidents that arise on campus [2]. Diversity Education can no longer operate with one educator and one graduate intern. As outlined in Proclamation P-19S-001 *A Case and Justification on the Intercultural Center*, students had advocated for a separate and expanded Office of Diversity Education, and the request was ignored.

[1] <https://thetute.com/2018/11/02/voting-posters-gone-wrong-the-push-for-diversity-at-stevens/>

[2] <https://www.stevens.edu/diversityed>

ii) Interim Title IX Coordinator

In Fall 2018, in the midst of a period of time known as the ‘Red Zone’ of college sexual assault [1], Stevens’ Title IX coordinator of ten years resigned. The university then announced the existing Director of Disability Services as an interim Title IX coordinator. [2]

In this period of time, there was no sole individual assigned to handling cases of discrimination, sexual violence, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, physical violence, stalking, relationship violence and retaliation, and related misconduct [3]. This happened on a campus with a 70 to 30 gender ratio (male to female respectively) [4] in a time when young women are at the highest risk of sexual assault [5].

This proposal’s authors were made aware that, during this period, a survivor that went through the existing Title IX process to report their abuser, a fellow student, was not referred to services, support, or a private space by the interim Title IX coordinator for their trauma.

According to other survivors who have confidentially come to the authors, but prefer not to share details, this is not an isolated incident of Stevens – a university that participates in Take Back the Night events annually – failing to be more than an impartial, even detrimental, institution to sexual assault survivors.

[1] <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/09/12/experts-say-new-methods-need-ed-combat-red-zone-campuses>

[2] <https://thetute.com/2018/09/07/student-life-bids-farewell-to-associate-dean-of-students-kristie-damell/>

[3] https://www.stevens.edu/sites/stevens.edu/files/files/UPL/Policy_on_Gender-Based_and_Sexual_Misconduct-Revised_4-15-19.pdf

[4] <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/stevens-institute-of-technology-2639>

[5] <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>

c) Bias & Diversity Training

i) Faculty Training Modules

After several suicides within the Stevens community, and the increased visibility of bias issues on campus, the SGA began to have conversations internally and externally with the Stevens Administration. After multiple discussions attempting to address these issues, President Farvardin told the SGA in an email that, “Mandatory Faculty training modules will be implemented with all faculty this fall on the following topics:

- Identifying and Responding to College Mental Health Issues
- Creating Inclusive Classrooms to Support Students..”

These modules would be invaluable for Stevens faculty and students, by fostering an environment in which mental health issues and biases could be openly addressed, however, their potential was never realized. The decision to mandate faculty training modules was reversed without the SGA or the student body being told. Students interact with faculty more than anyone on this campus. Explaining this discrepancy, Provost Christophe Pierre responded, “The understanding was that mandating the modules as a one-time thing would make it feel far too much like a task” When asked about numbers of how many faculty members had finished the modules, Provost Pierre related “we do not have accurate completion rate data available at this time.” [1] These training modules were made to protect students and educate faculty, yet there is still no public update on their implementation.

[1] <https://thestute.com/2019/09/27/mandating-of-faculty-training-modules-remains-under-consideration/>

ii) Safe-Zone Training

Stevens currently has one training in place to promote tolerance of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The training, Safe-Zone, is a set of two one-hour modules which explain basic definitions regarding gender and sexuality, and are intended to promote respect of students and faculty who belong to the LGBT+ community. However, the modules have had underwhelming participation in both the students and faculty, and have proved ineffective from removing bias based on gender identity and sexual orientation on campus. Faculty who have completed the training have still conducted themselves in a manner inconsistent with tolerance, such as dead-naming and misgendering transgender students, and using vocabulary which is explicitly discriminatory against the LGBT community.

V. Conclusion

“We will identify problems we are uniquely capable of solving, enriching our community with an awareness of our potential to affect change on a global scale and with the satisfaction of knowing that we can – collectively – make a difference.”

- Stevens Strategic Plan

This proposal is in no way an attack on the Stevens University name. This proposal is for the uppermost administration to directly hear the concerns of students. We know that Stevens has the potential to be one of the most student-centric schools in the country. The student leaders on this campus are second to none, and we know that given the resources and full support of administration this campus can be changed for the better.

On today, December 10th, the Stevens community members at this protest, as well as many who could not be in attendance, demand that the Stevens Institute of Technology President, Cabinet, and Board of Trustees acknowledge and accept the following terms to go forward to build a better university for all students, now and to come:

- ❖ The President, Cabinet, and Board of Trustees will send an official statement to the Stevens Student body recognizing and accepting the needs of students and issues in the aforementioned document.
- ❖ The President, Cabinet, and Board of Trustees will send an official statement to the Stevens Student body detailing all work that is being done on the aforementioned issues.
- ❖ The President, Cabinet, and Board of Trustees will publicly condemn the aforementioned discriminatory values, the same values shared by Greg Gianforte, in a campus-wide announcement, as well as readdress the concerns and ramifications of the naming on the Stevens Community with a committee containing at least 40% student representation.
- ❖ The President, Cabinet, and Board of Trustees, from this point forward, will involve the Student Government Association (SGA) when forming all Task Forces, Committees, or Panels.
- ❖ The President, Cabinet, and Board of Trustees will meet with the SGA as well as other student leaders appointed and approved by the SGA on a regular basis throughout the 2020 Spring Semester and all semester thereafter. (3 times per semester).

Per Aspera Ad Astra