

Dear Dean Edmonds,

On Thursday November 19th I met with Rochelle Mason and Cesar Cervantes, who had been informed (by whom I do not know) that I was involved with recent controversial posts on the anonymous social media app Yik Yak. Although they had no evidence other than a rumor “through the grapevine” as Ms. Mason put it, I came clean, believing that honesty was the best course of action given my embarrassment and shame for my actions. The following morning, I met with Ms. Mason and Zachary Kroger, who presented me with a two year suspension on the following grounds:

- 1) Abusive Behavior- Responsible
- 2) Disruption of Campus Activities- Responsible

The six word comment I admitted to writing then deleting shortly after was mean, hurtful, and neither reflective of my character, nor my actual beliefs. That being said, I still made the comment, and am deeply sorry for it. However, I would like to respectfully appeal for a retrial based on failure of the hearing process and bias in the decision-making process.

Firstly, The Pathfinder clearly outlines that the first step, or at least the beginning of the disciplinary process, is that “The student is informed of the alleged policy and/or standard violations.”<sup>1</sup> According to the Pathfinder this is supposed to occur before even a meeting date or time is set. This step was omitted throughout the hearing process. In fact, my specific “policy and/or standard violations” were mentioned for the first time the next day during my sentencing. Initially, when I asked why I was being summoned to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/studentguide/pathfinder/code-of-conduct/procedures.dot>

the office of Ms. Mason on November 19th, I was denied a specific answer. My sanction papers begin with “You met this afternoon with Senior Associate Dean of Students Rochelle Mason and Assistant Dean of Students Cesar Cervantes regarding allegations that you violated the student Code of Conduct.” Contrary to this statement, at no point during my meeting with Mr. Cervantes or Ms. Mason did either of them mention any specific school codes, values, or Pathfinder violations. During my hearing, rather than presenting me with my possible violations then investigating my actions and how they may have constituted those violations, I was simply treated as broadly guilty. It was as though I had been brought in to try to defend my position under presumptions of guilt. The Deans’ focus was on the larger body of November 9th Yik Yak posts, with little care given to the fact that my involvement was only six words, words that I apologetically admitted to authoring early in the meeting.

There was another procedural step in the Pathfinder that seemed to be completely ignored during my trial: The hearing body reviews the student’s prior conduct record and determines a sanction that is appropriate to the needs of the student and the CC community.<sup>2</sup> It is possible that this step may have occurred without my presence, but if it did neither Ms. Mason nor Mr. Cervantes nor Mr. Kroger communicated it to me. I am, or was till recently, very proud of my clean record in the eyes of both the school and the law. I was distraught that my clean record did not enter the conversation in any way, or if it did, I was never informed. Furthermore, It was never explained to me how my two year suspension was considered the option most “appropriate to the needs of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/studentguide/pathfinder/code-of-conduct/procedures.dot>

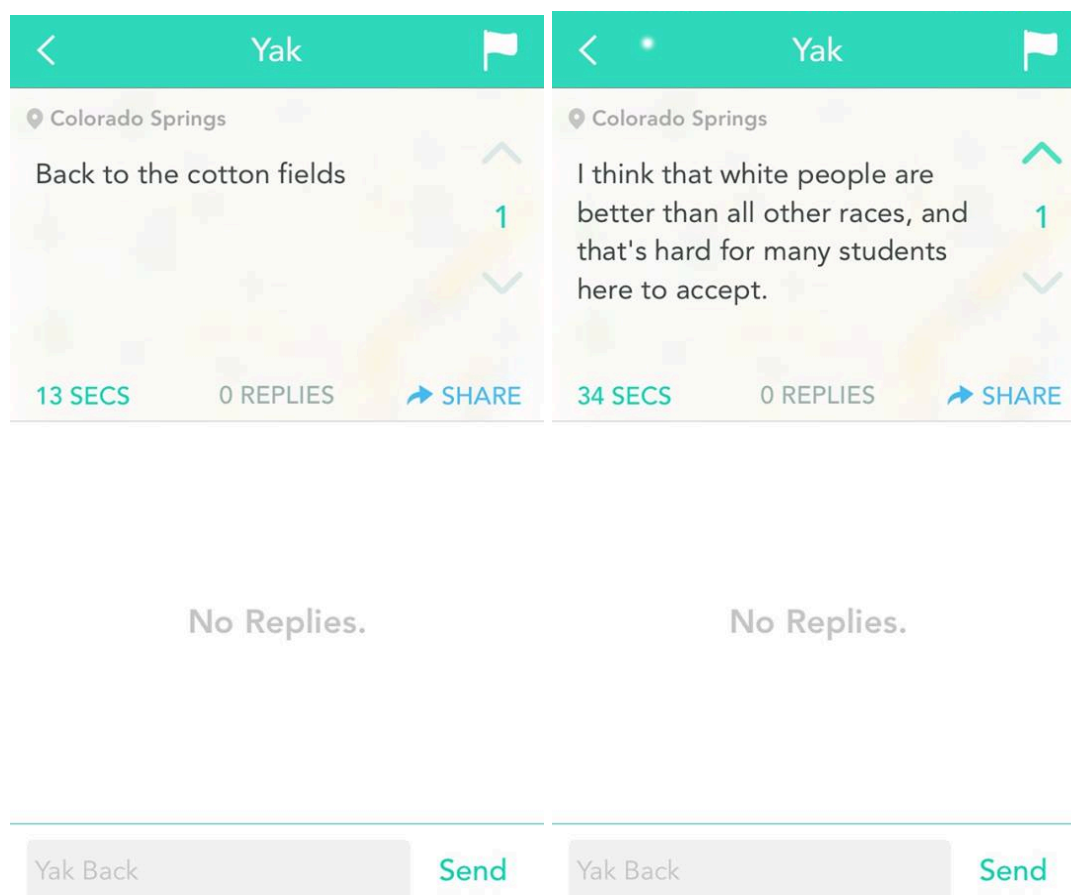
the student and the CC community”<sup>3</sup> as opposed to the many disciplinary options that were skipped. I write this appeal not simply to dispute the imposed sanction, I am protesting the way my hearing process violated the purposes and methods of The Pathfinder. The process was handled in a way that gave me very little information on how and why I was being considered immediately and just plainly guilty and worthy of suspension. Not only did I not feel I was given a proper opportunity to explain myself, I was given no opportunity to apologize, learn, or help mitigate any damage I had done to the community, thereby contradicting the goals of the disciplinary process laid out in the Pathfinder.

The second reason I appeal my decision is on the grounds of bias in the decision making process. Looking back at my hearing I realize that the focus of the Deans seemed to be on the larger body of Yik Yak posts that occurred the night of November 9th, with little focus given to the specific six words that I had admitted to authoring. Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes repeatedly asked, in what was an equally accusatory tone, if I had written several other, and in my opinion far more heinous, Yik Yak posts. Based on the treatment I received from the two, I am skeptical of their witnesses, whom I fear misled Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes to believe that I was responsible for a large body of the offensive posts on Yik Yak from the relevant time period. Their persistent inquiry about things that I had not written led me to believe that they were acting under the assumption that my involvement in the incident the night of November 9th ran far deeper than my six word comment. I was accused twice, both before and after admitting

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/studentguide/pathfinder/code-of-conduct/procedures.dot>

the extent of my involvement, about other Yik Yaks that expressed far more explicit language of white supremacy, racial slurs, and open hatred, all language and attitudes that I find despicable, and that I do not support or believe. I was horrified that my six word comment, “they matter, they’re just not hot”, albeit hurtful and distasteful, was being treated as equal to the posts authored by anonymous students who had neither been outed nor had come forward, and now remain at CC. Below are two examples of horrible posts that Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes repeatedly accused me of writing with seemingly equal conviction to my six-word acknowledgment that black women do, in fact matter, followed by a joking and mean-spirited expression of a sexual preference.



The night of November 9th on Yik Yak started as an exchange of racially charged jabs. Although the screenshots many students took only captured the posts aimed at students of color, the entire situation was started by comments aimed at white CC students. To name a few, “White boys at this school: dirty hippies with small dicks”, “Damn these white kids need their rich parents to buy them some soap”, “Why are white people always fucking their cousins?”, “I think it says a lot about white people that they’re dumb enough to watch NASCAR and listen to country music”. Apart from white and black students, other jabs targeted European Gypsies, the Irish, the Na’vi from the movie Avatar, Native Americans, Smurfs, Hispanics, Poles, and Muslims, among other groups based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, and even species. When the jabs began to get more offensive and hurtful and less humor-focused, I deleted my comment. Unfortunately, a screenshot taken by an anonymous student immortalized it. Upon questioning from the Deans, I came clean on my brief involvement in the events, hoping it would open a dialogue and more guilty students could come forward so the issue could be discussed by the community. I was raised to believe that honesty was always the best course of action.

In the below picture, I am guilty of posting then deleting the bottom comment.



To digress, I know that there are students at Colorado College who rejoiced at the news of my lengthy suspension. They voiced this on Yik Yak as word of my sentencing spread. In the following days several anonymous posters expressed a sense of satisfaction that both myself and my friend Lou (mentioning both of us by name) had been expelled (most of the campus thinks we were both expelled, or considers my two year suspension as an upperclassmen effectively an expulsion). I do not know who the witness (or witnesses) were who spoke with Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes, but I am of the conviction that they provided misleading information. I believe this based on the way that Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes asked me repeatedly about several other posts, even after I had fully admitted my six-word part in the matter. I understand that Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes were doing their jobs to the best of their abilities given the information they were provided. However, I assert that Ms. Mason and Mr. Cervantes

were biased in their treatment of the situation due to misinformation from their witness or witnesses.

Finally, I was never explained how my two year suspension was considered the option most “appropriate to the needs of the student and the CC community.”<sup>4</sup> as opposed to the many disciplinary options that were skipped. The hearing process gave me very little information as to how my specific six word comment was worthy of two years away from CC, the place I consider my home. Furthermore, how was the sanction I received chosen based on my violations as opposed to other potential sanctions cited in the Pathfinder?

- **Official Conversation:** A documented conversation with a CC official.
- **Official Warning:** A formal notice from CC that the conduct is unacceptable.
- **Reflection/Research Papers:** A document requiring critical analysis and articulation of a specified topic.
- **Program Attendance/Interview:** Required attendance at an event or interview that is relevant to a specific topic. This is often accompanied by a reflection/research paper.
- **Persona Non Gratis:** Prohibiting entry into a specific building on campus for a specific amount of time due to interference with the community.
- **Disciplinary Probation:** A formal notice from CC that any additional findings of responsibility will likely result in suspension from CC.

The final paragraph of my two year suspension for a six word comment states:

*“Our purpose in responding to alleged conduct violations is to: (1) educate one another;*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/studentguide/pathfinder/code-of-conduct/procedures.dot>

*provide an opportunity for growth and development; ensure student safety; and promote an environment that supports the educational mission of the college; and (2) to hold students accountable for their actions.”*

I deserve to be held accountable for my actions, this I accept. However, I do not see how the imposed two year suspension is an attempt to educate myself or the school community, which is supposed to be the purpose of the measures laid out in the Pathfinder by the hearing process and disciplinary sanctions. I beseech you to ask yourself this hard question: will harsh and immediate removal from the school (whether it be two years or permanent) encourage or discourage conversations on campus, not only of a very controversial incident, but of an entire body of ideas that it is the duty of my generation to engage? I appeal for a retrial by a new Hearing Body or Student Conduct Committee, where it is my hope that my story will be heard fairly and with due process by unbiased ears.

Sincerely,

Thaddeus Knight Pryor