

Regarding the recent racist incident on campus and your response:

May 2, 2023

The Blk Pwr Coalition

To Whom It May Concern:

Yesterday afternoon (May 1, 2023), a video seething with racial slurs and incendiary threats towards Black students was widely circulated on social media. The proponent of those statements, UW-Madison student Audrey Godlewski spoke freely with disdain and hatred dripping from her words and threats while the laughter in the background revealed the presence of others who found the comments entertaining.

The exact time and date of the recording of this video is unknown, but many reports indicate that this video could be at least a week old. Regardless of the date the video was prepared, it reveals the ongoing sentiment that many on this campus hold toward us and who have no fear expressing themselves in various public forums. Whether others recognize it or not, these comments and actions are blatant racism on display that have had a negative emotional effect on those of us who are proud to be Black and who call this university home. The effect that this video has had, and will continue to have, on the Black student population at UW-Madison is insurmountable.

When we chose to attend UW-Madison, we understood that it is a predominantly white institution (PWI), but we were assured that we were valued, welcome, appreciated and would be protected and safe. Therefore, when the video was revealed we assumed that University leadership would reiterate its promises to us, but that response failed to do so. The response from the University was not only inadequate in its sensitivity, but served to perpetuate the complacency of this University as it pertains to racial injustice.

May 1st was Decision Day for a lot of high school students nationwide. Thousands of students chose this University and will arrive in Madison this Fall because they chose to be Badgers. And of those thousands of students, hundreds of Black students worldwide are choosing to enroll at a university that does not care to protect them from those who perpetuate the harm that blatant racism causes. The watered-down statement from the University fails to do what it promised us when they recruited us.

It is our mission "to promote shared values of diversity and inclusion, to engage campus leadership in this endeavor, and to improve institutional access and success through effective retention policies."

Therefore, we demand that the University take the following actions on our behalf:

1. The immediate investigation for expulsion of Audrey Godlewski and the other students who are seen and/or heard in the video.
2. A public apology from the UW-Madison officials, including the Office of the Chancellor, to acknowledge the harm caused by this incident, and to demonstrate their future commitment to addressing racial bias on campus.

3. The release of the video created an emotional response that has impacted our ability to focus on our academic responsibilities. The university must recognize that institutional racism creates emotional distress for those who fall prey to its dictates. Therefore, we request immediate academic accommodations) extensions, incompletes, attendance exceptions, etc.) as we seek to deal with the emotional impact of what has been levied upon us by this video, the threats we have received in response, and the university's failure to protect us.
4. Increased funding for safe spaces for students of color to engage in healthy interactions to build a more inclusive campus community.
 - a. Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) on campus that host events promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and educating students of the dangers of racial violence.
 - b. A financial commitment from the University further demonstrates its stance on the prevention of racial prejudice on campus.
5. Reevaluate of the effectiveness of UW-Madison's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives incorporating input and feedback from student organizations leaders.
 - a. This will help to ensure these issues are sufficiently addressed and confirmation of these efforts to prevent others from arising.
 - b. Propose and support Bylaws to the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System's Student Non-Academic Disciplinary Procedures to establish a zero-tolerance policy on hate speech, which may result in expulsion for overt racial hostility on any University of Wisconsin System campus.
6. Create and implement new required programming for current and incoming students on issues involving Diversity, Equity & Inclusion to prevent racial bias incidents.
7. The University of Wisconsin-Madison currently requires students to enroll in the GetWise@Home program for violence prevention education for all first year and transfer students. Students only complete one GetWise@Home program of their choosing and currently none of the three options focus specifically on the prevention of racial bias.

8. Expansion of the University Health Services' Crisis Line to be a 24-hour resource for students to report racist incidents and to include incidents that occur beyond the campus. Students who use this hotline shall be able to have an investigation regarding the details of their situation.
9. Expansion of existing academic and mental health resources for students of color to alleviate the burden of navigating the current racial climate of the university, especially during important academic periods like final exams and midterms.

Complying with our demands not only sets forth a positive precedent for future Badgers, but ensures outgoing alumni, as well as current students, that the University is committed to making their Wisconsin experience as safe as possible. No student's educational studies should be interrupted due to anxiety about being attacked because of the color of their skin. As a prestigious research institution, UW-Madison should truly understand the importance of racial equity as well as consequences for those whose words infringe upon human rights. This was an attack on Black students at UW-Madison. Inaction is showing to others that this behavior is not only acceptable, but codified into the framework of our school's disciplinary culture.

This incident will not go away. As of the writing of this letter, a petition demanding the expulsion of Audrey Godlewski has surpassed 30,000 signatures. We, the students, wish to remain peaceful and sincerely hope that the harm stops here. If the University does not comply with our demands, then we, the students, will have to take matters into our own hands, legally and socially.

Best regards,

The Blk Pwr Coalition

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