

## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE LAFAYETTE ADMINISTRATION

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### INTRODUCTION

Dear President's Cabinet and Board of Trustees of Lafayette College,

Over the summer, we saw a surge of people come forward to tell their stories of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence on our campus. Alumni, current students, and staff have courageously shared accounts of their experiences on the @anti.violence.laf Instagram since June 2020. While this platform is new, the issue itself is not. Sexual violence is an epidemic on college campuses across the country, and Lafayette is no exception. Since PASA's founding in 2017, the number of reported instances of sexual misconduct have significantly increased (although it is important to note that most assaults still go unreported). Commonly misunderstood as a sign of increasing prevalence, in reality this increase in reports is reflective of a crucial shift in awareness of sexual misconduct at Lafayette. It should be noted that this awareness is largely due to the educational efforts put forth by PASA and other student groups, as well as changes in the national conversation around sexual violence. However, as we have seen from the stories shared on both the @anti.violence.laf and @black.at.laf accounts, we are still far from the inclusive and supportive community advertised to prospective students.

As the college has relied on PASA's advice and prevention efforts in the past, we offer our ideas for change in this letter (with support from One Love, the Lafayette Solidarity Coalition, and input from a community feedback form). Over the summer, you acknowledged "that the most lasting change we can make is to change aspects of the culture that may foster gender discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual misconduct" (as stated in President Byerly's letter on July 29). We recognize that many of these changes will not happen overnight. **We call for the creation of a comprehensive strategic plan to ensure our institution is actively working toward these changes, and that the strategic plan be shared publicly to better ensure transparency and assist the student body in holding the college accountable for its implementation.** PASA is willing and eager to meet with the administration to help provide input on this plan. However, because we are students first and foremost, we demand that the administration, in consultation with experts in the field, lead the initiative to create and implement this strategic plan to foster a safer and more inclusive campus community.

## ACTION ITEMS

Below we offer input for immediate and long-term changes which require action in order to better support survivors and work toward a campus free of sexual misconduct and gender-based violence.

### *IMMEDIATE ACTIONS:*

- **Accountability and Transparency**
  - We call on the administration to share what, if any, investigative measures took place following the allegations raised about Dean Dize on the @anti.violence.laf Instagram account. Articulate a plan to regain students' trust in the Office of Educational Equity and the Title IX process.
  - Policy and resources must be better communicated to students. While sending out the Title IX resource guide annually is a good first step, you must continue to work on other ways to make this information more digestible.
    - Make the student conduct page more visible on the Lafayette website. Create videos and infographics that are shared via social media, email, and the website that concisely explain and show the steps of the reporting process, possible resolutions and what these entail, options available to students, who they will be interacting with, etc. in language that is easy for students to digest.
    - Similarly, educate students on the similarities and differences between Lafayette policy, state policy, and federal policy.
    - Make the support offered by SM&RT faculty and staff more well-known and accessible to students. Create and share resources to help survivors find help, support, and healing. Conduct surveys with the student body to ensure that the current resources are easily accessible.
  - We urge the college to continually update the community on the utilization of the funds from the It's On Us grant that Lafayette has recently received to cover more training and prevention efforts.
  - We stand with Dear Lafayette College and wish to amplify their demands. We insist that the college follow through with the efforts outlined on the anti-racism website and continue to listen to the voices of students.
  
- **Bailey's Health Center**
  - Implement trauma-sensitivity training for Bailey's Health Center workers to ensure that the staff are knowledgeable about the effects of sexual assault and respectful of all sexual orientations.
    - Ensure that the morning after pill is easily accessible for students to acquire in a discrete manner, free of judgement.

- Increase the hours when the gynecologist and the psychiatrist are on campus and available for appointments. This is particularly important now, considering all students are expected to remain in the Lehigh Valley for the duration of the upcoming semester.
- **COVID-19**
  - Similar to the Good Samaritan policy, there should be no repercussions for survivors who may have broken COVID-19 regulations during the timeframe of their assault.
  - Articulate what options are available for pursuing an investigation during COVID-19 and how this might alter timelines for the investigation.
- **Reporting**
  - Create avenues for staff, contract workers, and faculty to report sexual misconduct without facing repercussions and make these publicly accessible.
  - Clarify how students are able to report any harmful behavior by administrators during or surrounding the Title IX process and make sure students are well informed about who will receive that report. Is this possible to report through One Pard? If so, how will you ensure that the administrator in question does not receive the report?
  - Ensure that the reporting party is able to get supportive measures immediately. No one should have to “learn to coexist” with their abuser, as many survivors on the @anti.violence.laf account have been told they must do.
- **Training**
  - Reevaluate the training for the Title IX Coordinator and the Deputy Title IX Coordinators.
    - Ensure that this training is trauma-sensitive and takes an intersectional approach.
  - In addition to the increased training on national and college policy, as well as anti-bias and anti-racism training, all faculty should be required to undergo training on gender equity and trauma-sensitivity to aid in creating safer classroom spaces for survivors and marginalized students.
  - Reevaluate the role of Public Safety on our campus and end partnerships with policing institutions, as many student activists have called for. Ensure that calls about sexual violence are responded to by trained counselors and health care providers.
    - Ensure that Public Safety is required to undergo trauma-sensitivity training, in addition to the newly mandated mental health training on the anti-racism website, to make sure officers respond to calls in trauma-informed ways.

- **24/7 Space**
  - Designate a space to be open 24/7 for students. This would allow students to access a public place at all times if they need to leave their dorm buildings for any reason. It could also help students avoid potentially harmful encounters with other students.

#### *LONG-TERM GOALS:*

- **Admissions**
  - Communicate the College's protocol regarding students who apply to Lafayette but were respondents in Title IX cases at their former institutions. There must be a review of the admissions process and practices to better ensure the safety of our community. We ask that the college take a leadership role at the national level for reviewing transfer students' transcripts for any past conduct violations. There must be a solid plan put forth to deal with situations such as these.
- **Athletics**
  - Invest in a sexual misconduct training program for athletic teams. In the past, this responsibility has been placed on PASA. This program should give teams the tools to hold each other accountable and encourage continual education.
    - Require a percentage of students on each team to attend bystander-intervention specific training.
- **Courses and Curriculum**
  - Considering the school's effort to expand, you must commit to hiring faculty across departments and programs whose research and teaching centers on addressing systems of oppression, including sexism and racism, to ensure that more students have an opportunity to take courses that address these issues.
    - Strive to build themes from these classes into the Common Course of Study, possibly by the addition of another Social Science elective that can only be fulfilled through these courses.
    - Focus on bringing more books into the summer reading for First-Years and more speakers to campus that address systems of oppression in the US.
- **Greek Life**
  - While sexual and gender-based violence is a widespread issue, these phenomena are rampant within Greek Life. In the Student Government Greek Life Climate Survey, 14 percent of open respondents mentioned sexual assault. The college must provide a well formulated plan as to how they will combat sexual and gender-based violence related to Greek Life involvement specifically. Greek Life

organizations must be held accountable for what occurs within their organizations.

- Respond to the results of the Greek Life Climate Survey from Student Government and communicate what next steps will be taken.

- **Investigations**

- Lafayette must hold true to the advertised timelines of investigations and ensure they are handled as efficiently as possible. Investigations that take much longer than the expected timeline harmfully impact survivors' academic and emotional well-being. One survivor wrote in @anti.violence.at.laf, "The process from initially opening the investigation until the decision took 286 days." If hiring more investigators has not helped reduce these timelines, you must look for alternative solutions.
- While the new advocate position will be able to assist the reporting party throughout the investigative process, how are you looking at other ways to make the investigative process more equitable for both parties involved in cases where the respondent has significantly more financial resources than the reporting party?
- Ensure that sanctions following investigations and informal resolutions are evidence-based and appropriate for the power-based nature of sexual misconduct. What "educational opportunities" must responding parties complete if found responsible? Make these more apparent to students and open them up for discussion and examination. How are we supposed to know if they are effective if we do not know what they are? Is there research to show their efficacy?

- **Office of Educational Equity**

- Creating an Office of Educational Equity that is comprehensive and able to adequately advocate for students, as well as take the lead in prevention education, must be a priority.
  - Review and monitor the new Advocacy and Prevention position to ensure that the individual hired feels adequately supported. If it becomes clear that the position is overwhelming, take the necessary steps to create more positions and divide the workload. Prioritize hiring more full-time staff for this office in the future.
  - Designate the Student Advocacy and Prevention Coordinator as PASA's advisor. PASA has had six different advisors since our founding. This designation would enable PASA to have a stable source of trained support and expertise. This is imperative since, currently, active students craft the entirety of the training for peer educators that then lead workshops across campus.

- **Prevention Education**

- Consult with experts in the field to create a comprehensive, multi-year prevention education and survivor allyship program for all members of the Lafayette community that is attentive to the intersectional nature of sexual violence and encourages individual and community change.
- Continue to invest in and support the implementation of a comprehensive first-year orientation sexual violence prevention program. Ensure that there is adequate staffing to carry out this program.

## **KEY DEMANDS: TRANSPARENCY & EXPANSION OF THE OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY**

The @anti.violence.laf Instagram page brought to light many instances of survivors feeling as though their cases were not handled appropriately in the Title IX process, with many specifically regarding Dean Dize. This rightfully sparked frustration among students — but we have yet to hear anything from the administration about what is being done to handle this situation. We call on the administration to share what, if any, investigative measures took place to ensure that students’ future experiences with Title IX are more empathetic, appropriate, and effective for whatever their needs may be. The student body has lost considerable faith in the Title IX process at Lafayette and the school must work towards regaining trust in order to allow Title IX to provide the resources that many survivors need. That begins by addressing the situation regarding Dean Dize, but continues through providing transparency regarding how you will be creating and implementing a strategic plan to end sexual violence on our campus.

We have spoken to President Byerly in years past about the need for a more robust Office of Educational Equity, but have witnessed minimal change in this area until the new Student Advocacy and Prevention Coordinator position was considered. It is evident that creating a fully staffed Office of Educational Equity is imperative to increasing advocacy and prevention efforts. The aforementioned goals are *reliant* on the successful expansion of the Office of Educational Equity. This “office” currently consists of one full-time position, our Title IX coordinator. Lafayette College has cycled through three different Title IX Coordinators in four years. We understand that there is a high rate of turnover for this position nationally, but this lack of stability negatively impacts students and must be addressed. A sufficiently staffed office is essential to sexual violence prevention efforts on campus. Any individual would find themselves overwhelmed by a workload of this size and caliber.

This office must consist of more than just the Title IX Coordinator and the new Student Advocate and Prevention Coordinator. While we are very pleased about this new position, we are also extremely worried that this person will be overworked and not adequately supported. President Byerly stated in her “Combatting Racism” letter in June that the new position would be one which would “serve as a resource, advocate, and caseworker for a diverse population of

students.” While sexual violence and racial violence are deeply connected issues, we urge you to consider creating a position for an Advocate and Prevention Coordinator specifically for instances of racial violence at our school as well. The college must make an active effort to ensure that the Office of Educational Equity continually expands until it is staffed with individuals who are trained to address all facets of discrimination on campus.

## CONCLUSION

We urge you to create a strategic plan for the implementation of *all* of these action items, but we want to stress the importance of creating lasting change. If you choose to only address the important suggestions for immediate actions, and not the dire need for an Office of Educational Equity that is adequately staffed, you are denying students the right to a safe and supportive learning environment. By not providing students with these different positions, you are profiting off of countless hours of unpaid labor of student activists who are doing the work to make this community safer. In the search for the next President of Lafayette College, we call upon the school to find a bold new leader who is willing to engage in difficult and courageous conversations around sexual and racial violence.

President Byerly issued a response to the @anti.violence.laf Instagram account in July, where she recognized the role of the administration in changing our campus culture, but also called on “the commitment of all members of our community to work together to end gender discrimination and sexual misconduct.” We couldn’t agree more.

All members of our community must actively work to take more accountability to create change. We all have a role to play in ending sexual violence on our campus. **However, students have been doing the heavy lifting in educating other students on how to best do this. The administration must take on a larger and more prominent role in prevention efforts.** PASA, a group formed only 4 years ago, currently does almost the entirety of sexual misconduct prevention education on campus. As leaders of this institution, you set the example for all of Lafayette College. To improve our campus climate, the administration must take responsibility and commit to making real, tangible changes. If you are not prioritizing the health, safety, and respect of all members of our community, how can you expect students to do so for each other?

Sincerely,

Pards Against Sexual Assault (PASA)