

Yesterday, members of the DePaul Divestment Coalition were called into a meeting with the Engagement Team established by the University.

FROM: Encampment Negotiators

DATE: May 2nd, 2024

NOTE: This statement has also been published to @DPUDivestCoalition on Instagram.

If there is one point you take away from this message, let it be that we are incredibly disappointed in how the email sent by the Office of the University President last night (subject line: "Engagement team meeting") misrepresented the meeting and the intentionality of the administration. While we will point out these inaccuracies, what we are experiencing should be taken as even more reason for our community to deepen our resolve to stand with those participating in the encampment and, most importantly, with the people of Palestine.

For one, the Engagement Team of the University did not include any individuals at the University that hold any decision-making authority on our boldest demands: disclosure and divestment (e.g. the Chief Financial Officer, members of the Board of Trustees Finance Committee, or President Manuel). But as we stressed in the meeting, those who were present from the administration could have very well addressed other demands today— including calling out the scholasticide and genocide, joining Chicago in calling for a ceasefire, assuring amnesty for participants, and having the University publicly stand against the doxxing of our community members. At this meeting, a faculty member stressed the importance of the institution communicating a shift in position that would show some degree of interest in considering our more intensive demands. But instead of responding to the demands presented during the meeting, the Engagement Team appears to have prioritized creating and distributing inaccurate correspondences filled with tired Vincentian platitudes that are missing from our interaction with the Engagement Team. Our encampment is here because of the University's repeated refusal to respond to any of our demands that further Palestinian liberation and ease Palestinian suffering, and we know that these demands are not at all new to the administration and have been vocalized many times before the launch of this encampment.

We would be remiss to not mention that all the "dialogue" insisted upon by the administration began with the Engagement Team deciding to only invite Muslim students via United Muslims Moving Ahead and Students for Justice in Palestine whom they considered the leadership of our encampment, even though the DePaul Divest referendum is backed by a coalition of over thirty student organizations and a mass of faculty who support the encampment. This decision not only ignores the hard work of our diverse, multi-faith, and interconvictional coalition but also contributes to the conflation of actions for Palestinian liberation with Muslim students and organizations on campus which increases and perpetuates the emotional and physical harm Muslim students at DePaul endure daily.

To us, this reaffirms, as put into words in an earlier published letter by our Student Body President the need to "Recognize that at DePaul, the notion of a diverse, 30+ organization coalition advocating for financial transparency and divestment is not palatable to the institutions of shared governance. From cooking to animation to law student organizations, our diverse interests and shared values make us so much stronger than we realize. So what materializes, instead, is a cruel, demeaning narrative of SJP as a sole actor— as a careless and irresponsible ringleader of a fringe cause." After expressing our concern about this Orientalist and frankly reductive characterization of the encampment action as an effort being led by only Muslim students, we were able to insist on having the Student Body President and a representative from Jews for Justice in attendance.

You might be wondering: what exactly do we think of this email?

Among other things:

- At no point did the Engagement Team inform the encampment leadership that the encampment was having a “moderate impact on university operations.”
- The Engagement team could also not provide evidence of the encampment disrupting “a safe campus environment for all,” in fact they patronizingly complimented negotiators on the organization and de-escalation skills of our safety Marshal team.
- After being prompted several times by at least three members of the encampment leadership, nobody on the Engagement Team could name an actual chant that was “intimidating and inciting violence.”
- When attempting to “raise concerns” the Engagement team did not by any means “[communicate] a clear message” regarding anything they insinuated was happening at the encampment.
- At no point during the meeting was it highlighted that the encampment is “in violation of multiple university policies” and disciplinary action was not mentioned despite the email stating that the violations must “ultimately [be] addressed.” The phrasing here is nothing more than a thinly veiled threat.

“Dialogue” is not:

- ... not involving or inviting the Student Body President Parveen, who is often racialised as Muslim, to the Engagement Team and instead inviting her white Vice President without even informing Parveen about the existence of the team.
- ... members of the Engagement Team, including a student not participating in the encampment, lurking around the Quad without identifying themselves as affiliated with the University response in an attempt to have encampment participants speak to those negotiating from the administration side of the table without realizing it.
- ... the University tagging SJP DePaul in a post on Instagram last night knowing full well that this reinforces the dangerous and reductive perception that this entire encampment action is only being led by SJP.
- ... the Engagement Team emailing, calling, and texting outside of business hours in an attempt to emotionally and physically exhaust organizers, a tactic we already see happening at other encampments.
- ... the Engagement Team initially opting to invite only Muslim students to represent our incredibly diverse coalition and our demands for Palestine.
- ... the Engagement Team not allowing encampment organizers to record under the guise of confidentiality to then misrepresent the meeting to the entire University community.
- ... the Engagement Team lacking proper financial authorities of the University in its membership who could actually respond to our encampment’s demands around disclosure and divestment.
- ... the University pretending to be a good-faith negotiator by employing someone they claim to be a third-party mediator who actually sits on the administrator’s side of the table as a member of the Engagement Team.

We reject the co-optation and normalization of our encampment. We reject the two-faced attempts of some members of the Engagement Team sharing how “proud” and “impressed” they are by the encampment and in the same breath not caring about why we are even here. We will only correspond with those on the Engagement Team once we receive substantive, written feedback on every single one of our demands from the individuals who actually have the authority to implement these demands.

Calling out the scholasticide and genocide, joining Chicago in calling for a ceasefire, assuring amnesty for participants, and having the University publicly stand against the doxxing of our community members are all demands that could very well be met by the current members of the Engagement Team today. The Engagement Team’s failure to include anyone in the administration with financial insight indicates to us their desire to misconstrue our mission from divestment.

Do not allow yourself to be distracted by the narratives that the University is trying to impose upon our encampment and the movement writ large. We know why we are here, we know that we will not engage until we hear responses to our demands, and we know we will not leave until DePaul divests.