

Princeton USG Senate  
Meeting 9  
December 5, 2021  
8:00PM



**Undergraduate  
Student  
Government**

**Introduction**

1. Question and Answer Session (15 minutes)
2. President's Report (5 minutes)

**New Business**

1. Committee Reports (5-10 minutes/committee)
2. RCDB Report: Reade Ben (10 minutes)

## **Introduction**

This report investigates the radical change in the disciplinary process during the 2020-21 school year. This report addresses 7 critical topics, as follows:

- 1.) record-high quantities of disciplinary probation (DP)
- 2.) a vague and ambiguous Social Contract
- 3.) arbitrary punishment and unequal sentencing for violations of the same nature
- 4.) misleading information about the likelihood of and consequences of DP
- 5.) flaws in the Residential College Disciplinary Board adjudication process, including sweeping, catch-all tactics, fishing expeditions, and aggressive penalties
- 6.) the use of private investigators (PIs) and invasive interviewing tactics
- 7.) the continuation of harsh policing and inequitable penalties this semester

This report uses ODUS data and student testimonies. Names are redacted for purposes of confidentiality.

A major concern of the Undergraduate Student Government is the administration's radical divergence from precedent in policing and punishing students and its failure to clearly notify students of its new and harsh standards. We fear last semester broke important bonds of trust between Princeton and its students. Accordingly, we urge the administration to seriously address this issue and consider implementing the recommendations we outline at the end of this report.

## Section I: Background

### *What is Disciplinary Probation?*

We preface this section with a definition of DP. It is a punishment reserved for severe violations of the *Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities (RRR)*. According to the RRR:

*“Disciplinary probation appears on an individual’s permanent record at the University (but not on the transcript) and may be disclosed by the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students or the Office of the Dean of the Graduate School in response to requests for which the student has given permission or as otherwise legally required.”<sup>1</sup>*

The RRR elaborates on the nature of DP:

*“A more serious admonition assigned for a definite amount of time. It implies that any future violation, of whatever kind, especially but not exclusively during that time, may be grounds for suspension, suspension with conditions, or in especially serious cases, expulsion from the University. Disciplinary probation will be taken into account in judging the seriousness of any subsequent infraction even if the probationary period has expired.”<sup>2</sup>*

DP results in serious consequences for students during their time as undergraduates and after graduation. Students applying for international programs, campus endorsements for fellowships, or academic awards must disclose their DP. According to the Student-Athlete Handbook, student-athletes found responsible for a “*major violation*,” which is categorized as “a

---

<sup>1</sup> *Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities (RRR)*

<sup>2</sup> *RRR*

*University disciplinary infraction*” that warrants “*six months or more of University probation due to the severity of the incident*” face a minimum one game contest suspension, with additional infractions contributing to more suspensions.<sup>3</sup>

DP must be disclosed to graduate schools, law schools, medical schools, fellowship applications, and on any other applications that require disclosure.

The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE), for example, provides a publicly available sample of its Character and Fitness Questions. The NCBE’s sample reads: “have you ever been dropped, suspended, warned, placed on scholastic or disciplinary probation, expelled, requested to resign, allowed to resign in lieu of discipline, otherwise subjected to discipline, or requested to discontinue your studies by any college or university?”<sup>4</sup> **Note this question even includes warnings**, which Princeton categorizes as an informal sanction (the lowest form of punishment). Disclosure for the sake of assessing character and fitness is the norm when pursuing any sort of professional or academic opportunity. Princeton does not make its students aware of the life altering impact DP has on their futures.

Based on past discipline reports, we observe that actions causing tangible damages usually warrant DP. This includes violations of school policies and/or state laws falling into the categories of:

- Academic
- Alcohol
- Assault
- Dishonesty/Fraud
- Disorderly Conduct

---

<sup>3</sup> *Student-Athlete Handbook 2021-22*

<sup>4</sup> *NCBE Character and Fitness Sample Application*

- Drugs
- Harassment/Respect for Others
- Hazing
- Health and Safety
- Information Technology
- Property Damage & Vandalism
- Theft<sup>5</sup>

The notion of tangible damages is important to keep in mind as we assess the record high quantity of DP given out last semester.

In the 2020-21 school year, 579 students were found responsible for committing infractions. 432 of these students were found responsible for Health and Safety violations. These violations involved violations of the Social Contract. Of these 432 students, 349 students were placed on DP. Half of those placed on DP (175) were given DP because they missed more than two COVID tests.

The number of infractions during the 2020-21 school year were nearly quadruple that of past years, indicating a disproportionate sentencing of DP.<sup>6</sup> Last year's infractions were an outlier **(2x-4x more than past years)** when compared to infractions given out in past years:

- 2019-20: 235 infractions (144 DP)
- 2018-19: 185 infractions (87 DP)
- 2017-18: 176 infractions (92 DP)
- 2016-17: 344 infractions (201 DP)<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> *Annual Discipline Reports 2016-2021*

<sup>6</sup> *Annual Discipline Reports 2016-21*

<sup>7</sup> *Annual Discipline Reports 2016-21*

This means that in 2020-21 **more students were found responsible for infractions and put on DP for social contract violations alone than for** all other categories, combined, each year, over the past five years.

Indeed, in past years, many instances of misconduct were also criminal violations (theft, vandalism, assault). However, even these violations of a criminal nature did not warrant such aggressive proportions of DP. Last semester, of 11 students found responsible for theft, only 3 were given DP.<sup>8</sup> In 2018-19, of 27 students found responsible for theft, only 4 were given DP.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in every year since 2016, a majority of students who committed theft only received Dean's Warnings.<sup>10</sup> Last semester, however, of the 432 students who committed health and safety violations, 80 percent of them received disciplinary probation.<sup>11</sup> **Effectively, if you were a Princeton Student last year, you were punished more severely for missing two COVID test than for committing a criminal act.** It is not illegal in the state of New Jersey to make an honest mistake and miss a COVID test. It is to steal.

Based on this report's investigations and general hearsay, it appears that a great deal of students given DP received sentences equal to or greater than 6 months. If we take information from the Student-Athlete Handbook and the Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Residential College Disciplinary Board at face value, we can estimate that a large portion of the 369 students on DP for Social Contract Violations are objectively, in accordance with university policy, and on paper, considered as having committed a "major violation" that warranted a "serious admonition."<sup>12</sup> At face value, this is absurd. Academically-driven students and talented

---

<sup>8</sup> *Annual Discipline Report 2020-21*

<sup>9</sup> *Annual Discipline Report 2018-19*

<sup>10</sup> *Annual Discipline Reports 2016-21*

<sup>11</sup> *Annual Discipline Report 2020-21*

<sup>12</sup> *Annual Discipline Report 2020-21; Student-Athlete Handbook 2021-22; RRR*

student athletes should not have to face rejection from campus endorsements or game suspensions for forgetting a COVID test or honestly misinterpreting an ambiguous Social Contract.

Moreover, last semester, Princeton did not have any crises or severe COVID outbreaks. This means DP was assigned to students without properly assessing exactly how damaging a missing COVID test or one extra individual in one's room really was. Given the minimal number of tangible damages, the fact that lengthy terms of DP are still in effect is concerning. It communicates that students on DP have committed threatening actions on-par with criminal acts. It over-exaggerates the actual severity of actions made by students, many of whom made honest mistakes as they interpreted a convoluted Social Contract and navigated a labyrinth of hastily strung together University FAQs, pamphlets, and emails.

What is most egregious about this disproportionate punishment, however, is that students were not adequately forewarned of just how severe University policy would be. Moreover, students are not aware of how crippling it is when applying to jobs, graduate school, or fellowship programs.

## **Section II: A Poorly Constructed Social Contract**

We identify two major problems with Princeton's Social Contract. First, it was poorly written and ambiguous. Second, this ambiguity created discrepancies with other University resources and provided no clear sense of consequences for violations.

The Social Contract is a structurally poor document. As a contract, it is not even provisioned, but rather consists of a laundry-list of bullet points. There is no clear delineation of

---

penalties, putting the burden on students to speculate themselves. There is no tiered list of different violations and corresponding penalties.

There is no section of definitions clearly outlining what various “key” terms mean. The Social Contract dedicates a few brief paragraphs to violations. They read:

*“I understand that violations of the Social Contract deemed significant by the University, including those related to violating quarantine or isolation orders, hosting unpermitted visitors in on-campus residences, and hosting prohibited in-person gatherings will normally result in being barred from campus as well as other disciplinary action.”*

*“In addition, I understand that repeated infractions related to wearing face coverings, physical distancing, or participation in testing will result in disciplinary action and, if serious, may also result in being barred from campus.”*

*“All alleged violations of the Social Contract and/or other conduct policies will be adjudicated through Princeton’s established disciplinary process set forth in Rights, Rules, Responsibilities.”<sup>13</sup>*

These paragraphs provide, at best, a bare minimum explanation for students. What does “barred from campus” mean? Is this for a week? A year? A semester? What constitutes a “repeated infraction?” What does “normally” mean? Are there extenuating circumstances? **What about honest mistakes?** What does “other disciplinary action” and “through Princeton’s established disciplinary process” really mean? The RRR outlines a plethora of disciplinary

---

<sup>13</sup> Princeton University’s Social Contract for Spring 2021- Updated



processes for separable and non-separable offenses. The “disciplinary action” referenced covers a broad spectrum, from a warning to expulsion.

Moreover, the RRR did not adequately incorporate the Social Contract and its relation to the RCDB into any of its sections. This ad-hoc, unincorporated nature made it difficult to adequately categorize Social Contract violations, causing the nature of discipline to change throughout the term and impact students in different ways at different points in time. For example, last semester, Social Contract violations were initially categorized as “Disorderly Conduct,” and were then changed to “Health and Safety” Violations later in the semester. The fluid nature of both the Social Contract and the discipline that followed it meant that at different points in the school year, students were at risk of being treated unequally for similar offenses. More importantly, last year’s disciplinary report does not reflect the evolving nature of Social Contract discipline, which leaves the at-large student body with an unclear, skewed perception of last semester’s haphazard disciplinary process.

The Social Contract’s vague clauses, left undefined, are reasonably contestable. They lure students into a false sense of security by suggesting that the Social Contract is an interpretable, flexible document. This was not the case, as a slew of following examples will demonstrate.

### **Section III: Arbitrary Punishment and Unequal Sentencing for Violations of the Same Nature**

As aforementioned, the adjudication process evolved throughout the semester, so that students who committed infractions later-on received different punishments and charges for similar violations.

Student 1 provides a unique lens through which one can observe the evolution of discipline during the fall and spring semesters. Student 1 was on campus for both semesters, and was investigated for missing COVID tests during both those semesters. For missing three COVID tests during their fall semester, Student 1 received 24 months of DP. While being investigated during their second semester, however, Student 1 noted a change in the testing-absence penalty when they asked their DSL about it. In an email to Student 1, their DSL wrote:

*“Students who have missed multiple tests after receiving a warning could potentially get 6 months of disciplinary probation.”*

While Student 1 was not found responsible for non-compliance in the second semester, they noted that it seemed unfair that the duration of punishment radically changed from the fall to the spring semester. As an FLI student, Student 1 noted that students on campus in the fall were there for emergency housing: “we (were) not here by choice, we had to be here.” Based on Student 1’s correspondence, it appears FLI students were disproportionately impacted by harsh disciplinary penalties. The email makes clear that missing multiple COVID tests could at worst warrant six months of DP. Why, then, was Student 1’s sentence never reduced to be in line with the spring policy? Student 1 suffered an inequitable punishment for something they could not control: their home situation and need for emergency housing.

Violations of the exact same nature warrant the same punishment. Based on Student 1’s experience, FLI students were penalized four times as harshly as students were in the spring semester. The administration cannot say that they referenced the number of COVID cases or circumstances for the discrepancy in this punishment: there is no criteria for quantifying this, nor is it specifically outlined anywhere in university policy. It is unfair that students on campus in the

fall of 2020 for emergency housing were treated like guinea pigs in a trial run of the Social Contract. Unequal sentencing deserves an explanation. To date, there is none.

#### **Section IV: Misleading Information in Connection with Consequences of DP**

The Directors of Student Life (DSLs) and the Office of the Dean of the Undergraduate Students (ODUS) failed to understand and notify students of the severe consequences of DP. Multiple students reported that when they asked their DSLs how DP might tangibly impact their futures and Princeton careers, they were effectively told not to worry. In fact, Dean Deignan, in a response to Student 2's appeal, wrote specifically:

*“In our experience, disciplinary records such as yours do not inhibit students from pursuing their goals.”<sup>14</sup>*

This, however, could not be farther from the truth. In fact, the existence of disclosure sections on graduate school and fellowship applications negates Dean Deignan's claim. The fact that such programs require disclosure means that, at best, DP can have only a negative effect on an application. This is true even at Princeton. The Office of International Programs Policies FAQ page notes: “a prior disciplinary record does not preclude approval to study abroad, but the Study Abroad Program will review students' disciplinary records with the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students to determine if the record warrants withholding approval.”<sup>15</sup> Given that the Social Contract and the discipline that followed it was entirely new, and that punishments largely diverted from precedent, there is no certainty that Dean Deignan's reassurance of past “experience” is even relevant.

---

<sup>14</sup> *Electronic Correspondence: Student 3*

<sup>15</sup> *Office of International Programs Policies FAQ*

These sections require detailed explanations of disciplinary incidents. For many students given lengthy or maximum sentences of DP that stretch beyond their Princeton graduation dates, these sections set them up for failure. An explanation that something such as a missed COVID test or minor social contract violation warranted the most severe level of punishment (aside from separation) is almost unbelievable. It requires a student to do two things. They can either fully throw themselves at the mercy of admissions officers, apologize profusely for violations that do not warrant such profuse apologies, and give in to a fear-mongering narrative that their actions were so egregious and terrible that they warranted penalties previously distributed for the worst offenses. This is grim. **Alternatively, students can attempt to explain away the large discrepancy between the punishment and the crime, which seems unlikely given the apparent difficulty of convincing those unfamiliar with last semester that the policies of the nation's top university are actually incoherent and poorly constructed.**

Given the serious nature of disclosure, the burden of proof is on the administration to demonstrate that students on DP have an equally likely chance of achieving their goals as they would without DP. Unfortunately, proving this is impossible: the paradoxical situation described above is not theoretical.

Student 3 received DP last semester after being in a room with five individuals (including himself) for no more than five minutes. This student was in the middle of interviews for graduate school and had to declare their DP as this process was occurring. After his disclosure, an interviewer informed Student 3 that their DP was a critical factor in denying them admission to their dream program. This damage is un-correctable. The damage done to this student is far worse than the damages their minor infraction caused. None of those in their room tested positive for COVID.

**Section V: Flaws in the Residential College Disciplinary Board Adjudication Process,  
Including Lack of Clarity, Fishing Expeditions and Overly-Aggressive Penalties**

The RCDB does not communicate with students in a clear and timely manner. Major issues include misleading information in connection with the severity of penalties, long waiting periods for decisions, and failure to update convicted students with important policy updates. In multiple instances last semester, students expressed discontent with the RCDB's apparent lack of sympathy for extenuating circumstances and overly vague responses to initial concerns about their cases. We will return to the case of Student 1.

Student 1, during the time they missed their tests, was battling incredibly difficult personal issues, including family illness and trauma from sexual assault, and was seeing a CPS-provided therapist. Additionally, Student 1 was adjusting to a steep learning curve as an FLI student at Princeton during a pandemic. Student 1 noted: "I did not miss COVID tests because I wanted to. I was going through so much I could not even leave my room." While dealing with their personal struggles, Student 1 noted that the warnings sent them for noncompliance and their communication with their DSLs was incredibly haphazard. Student 1 shared that students living in emergency housing in the fall semester of 2020 had "two pairs of everything:" two deans, two

DSLs, and two confusing lines of communication. This is because all students on campus lived in Whitman. This meant these students answered to the Dean and DSL of Whitman College and those of their respective colleges. This made Student 1's ability to understand their investigation incredibly confusing. Warning emails for missed tests were sent by "random names" that were difficult to identify amongst a flurry of other emails in Student 1's inbox. They stated a "(phone)call for noncompliance" would have been more helpful. More importantly, Student 1 stated that "with two sets of everything," they believed no one had full information or insight into their mental health struggles and personal issues. Student 1 believed that their DSLs would understand the extenuating nature of their circumstances. They were shocked to find they were given 24 months of probation. To Student 1, it was concerning that their DSL was both the "person who investigated you and who advocates for you." For a first generation college student hundreds of miles from home, the role of a DSL appears disingenuous when the sympathetic persona introduced at orientation is dispelled by a harsh punishment, even after the disclosure of sensitive, personal information.

During the spring semester, Student 1 was accused of testing noncompliance for missing COVID tests. These tests, however, never properly scanned. Student 1 had witnesses to vouch for their compliance as they and a group of friends submitted tests together while observing Ramadan.

During Student 1's second investigation, however, sympathy again was not extended. At this point, Student 1 had been and was maintaining a diligent line of communication with their DSL, updating them on the status of their well-being and asking for assistance during an overwhelming semester. On April 21, Student 1 wrote to their DSL:

*“I am reaching out because a lot has been going on and I am feeling very overwhelmed and depressed. In the past couple of weeks I have been struggling with trauma from being sexually assaulted when I was younger (college is the first time I was able to talk about it with my therapist), dealing with Ramadan being entirely during the school year for the first time, and the loss of Imam Sohaib who I had a very meaningful connection with.”*

A little more than a week later, on May 6, Student 1 was served with an email from a PI requesting to arrange a time for an interview about testing non-compliance. Despite their DSL being well aware of Student 1’s mental condition, their observation of Ramadan, and it being finals period, a rigorous investigation was still pursued against Student 1, this time via a PI.

The investigation was draining for Student 1 (described in Section VI), and that the rigor with which it was pursued made them feel as if they were “supposed to be in jail.” Student 1 said: “if I did not have friends to vouch for me (my compliance), I would have had six more months (of DP)”. If Student 1 had been in the same situation they were in during the fall, isolated, far from home, and alone, they might have not been so lucky. What is most shocking, however, is the blatant disregard for Student 1’s wellbeing, and the pursuit of a rigorous investigation in the middle of Ramadan and finals.

The lack of sympathy in the RCDB process seems to be a consistent theme. Student 4 stated: “I was given no sympathy and was given single-word answers to my questions regarding the adjudication process.” Student 4 also noted that while their decision deadline was set for two days after meeting with their DSL, they had to wait three weeks to receive their decision. Student 4 stated:

*“I followed up constantly about the situation, and all (my DSL) asked for was more sympathy due to the fact that (they were) so stretched for time. However, I was never given the same courtesy for meetings, timelines, and documents.”*

Commenting on their experience, it seems the entire disciplinary process left Student 4 exhausted and defeated:

*“my final decision was finally given to me in a copy-and-paste email in which my name was not (correct). The entire situation caused an immense amount of stress, taking away my own personal mental capacity from my studies and my personal relationships. Instead of my DSL being a resource for me... (they were) only a burden.”*

Tardiness and vagueness in decision-making appears to be a theme with the RCDB: Student 5, for example, reported that when they asked their DSL what their expected punishment might be, their DSL responded that it could range anywhere from a Dean’s Warning to expulsion from campus. Student 5 noted that simply hearing their punishment ranged between the minimum and maximum penalties was not meaningful nor helpful at all. For Student 5 in particular, getting expelled from campus was nerve-wracking: they were unsure if they would have money to find housing, store their personal belongings, or afford a plane ticket home. When Student 5 asked their DSL about these concerns, they were simply told the expectation was that students who got removed from campus would be able to find off-campus housing. They were provided with a very vague timeline for when they might have to vacate campus, and only when they specifically asked for it. Their only guidance was word-of-mouth communication from their DSL, who told them they would have about a week to move out of their dorm. Moreover, Student 5 had no conception of when they might have to start packing or moving out, because the RCDB was two weeks late in delivering its decision to them. The student noted their



situation was particularly troublesome because they lacked any form of official counsel or support system in connection with official University policy other than that of their DSL, who would ultimately be judging them. Student 5 communicated it felt rather psychologically disorienting that their DSL was simultaneously judge, jury, and confidant. The person there to support Student 5 was also the one penalizing them. In this way, the whole process seemed far from objective.

Student 5 endured the stress of their investigation for four weeks (even though the RCDB informed them a decision would be made in two). On top of managing their course load, Student 5 noted they had to actively advocate for themselves and ask, day-by-day, when they might receive a decision. Student 5, who had no guidance as to what realistically might happen to them, and who had to wait for a month to find, noted that the RCDB's lack of timeliness and clarity "only added undue stress to their problem." Their problem was simply having four mask-wearing guests in a room for roughly five minutes.

Student 3 corroborated this claim, noting that the long, uncertain waiting period had them feeling "nauseous waking up in the morning," and that their feelings of anxiety lasted as long as their investigation, which was nearly half the semester.

While Student 5 was ultimately not removed from campus, they still are confident this does not negate the fact that the fear of being removed from campus with nowhere to go was extremely damaging to their mental health. In fact, Student 5 attributes their being able to stay on campus to a detail he included in the letter they were allowed to write to their DSL prior to their hearing. If they had missed the opportunity to submit their letter (which the RCDB only gives students around 12 hours to do, the day before their adjudication), Student 5 could have very

well been removed from campus with nowhere to go. Even if this is something Princeton would never let happen, the fact that Student 6 readily believed it could happen is nearly as bad.

Student 5's story does not end here. Student 5 was originally charged with a Disorderly Conduct Violation. However, in the 2020-21 disciplinary report, all Social Contract Violations were listed as Health and Safety violations. This reflects a schoolwide change made by the RCDB, late last semester, to change the category of Social Contract Violations. To their knowledge, Student 5 has falsely believed they have been disorderly for nearly the past year. They received no notice from their DSL that the status of their charge entirely changed. This is not anomalous. Another student, Student 6, who also received DP for a Social Contract violation, believed they were disorderly, up until they happened to ask their DSL late this semester after reviewing the 2020-21 Annual Discipline Report.

The failure of the DSLs and RCDB to inform students that the category of their violations totally changed is unacceptable. Disorderly conduct, under the RCDB, is an umbrella term that includes theft, assault, vandalism, and other actions that disturb the peace. Students quietly in their rooms are certainly not disorderly. In past years and annual reports, being disorderly carries stronger implications than health and safety violations, as it describes actions that have direct, tangible, physical damages inflicted on another party or person. The switch to a Health and Safety violation does indeed correctly reflect the nature of sitting over-capacity in a room during a pandemic, but the failure of DSLs to inform students of this change renders it moot. Leading students to believe, and presumably report to others, that their conduct was disorderly carries damaging connotations.

## Section VI: The Use of Private Investigators and Invasive Interviewing Tactics

Last semester, the RCDB employed several PIs tasked with interviewing students who were reported to have violated the Social Contract or RRR. Student testimonies reflect the PI's tactics were extremely invasive. Student 1 stated their conversation with their PI was "surreal." Student 1 noted: "I literally broke down crying, they asked me about everything, detail by detail." Student 1 was required to, in real time, search their email inbox and send screenshots to the PI. When Student 1 told the PI they had sprained their ankle and gone to seek medical attention, they had to provide proof of that. Every and any discrepancy, or even a mistake in speech, was seriously questioned. Student 1 stated: "if you slip or use the wrong word or wrong date, that can be used against you." Student 1, already dealing with paranoia and anxiety from their DP in the fall, felt as if they were being interrogated: "it made me feel like I was supposed to be in jail."

In some instances, the vigor with which PIs hounded students seemed indistinguishable from harassment. Student 7 commented on their experience with a PI:

*"The questioning process was incredibly coercive and honestly, scary. I was not asked one single question about the supposed purpose of the investigation until halfway through the conversation, as **the time was instead spent by the investigator fishing for other potential violations.** They didn't even feel like questions, more like statements of things you may have done that violated protocol, and you were left to refute them. I was lied to during my conversation in order to get me to "confess" to an incident that did not and could not have taken place. **They would ask specific questions about other students and the nature of their personal and/or romantic relationships with you or with other students. This was incredibly invasive, irrelevant, and quite simply inappropriate.** At the end of the interview, I was sworn to secrecy and in the same*

*breath was reminded that CPS exists. This odd suggestion signaled to me that ODUS was fully aware that they were conducting their investigations in a way that would cause a student to need mental health services but continued to do so anyway.”*

Students deserve fair and appropriate interviews. Invasive questioning is unacceptable. For an institution that prides itself on being “in the Nation’s service and the service of humanity,” anyone would be shocked to hear that the University’s interviewing tactics violate their students’ Fifth Amendment rights by stripping them of protection against self-incrimination.

Student 4 reported they were required to talk to a PI **seven** different times over the course of last semester. Student 4 was first investigated for Social Contract violations, and, after being interviewed, was also charged for hazing, because they went to get coffee with an upperclassman in their social organization. Ultimately, after weeks of investigation, this student received DP for violating the Social Contract. They also received a Deans’ Warning for getting coffee with an upperclassman, for being a *victim* of hazing.

Student 4’s case raises a plethora of **major, interrelated concerns**. First, Student 4 was initially investigated for Social Contract violations, and through invasive interview tactics that extracted information from them, was also punished for hazing. Second, the nature of Student 4’s investigation borders on harassment.

The fishing strategy used to bring Student 4 up on multiple, unrelated charges is manipulative. Student 4 noted that during their interviews, many questions seemed totally unrelated to the nature of their charge. Moreover, this student did not reasonably expect that getting coffee with an upperclassmen mentor would be considered *hazing*, which the RRR describes as:

*“Examples of hazing include but are not limited to the following:*

- *Ingestion of alcohol, food, drugs, or any undesirable substance.*
  - *Participation in sexual rituals or assaults.*
  - *Emotionally or psychologically abusive or demeaning behavior.*
- *Acts that could result in physical, psychological, or emotional deprivation or harm.*
- *Physical abuse, e.g., whipping, paddling, beating, tattooing, branding, and exposure to the elements, or the threat of such behaviors.*
- *Participation in illegal activities or activities prohibited by University policy.”<sup>16</sup>*

While the “not limited to” phrase creates room for other examples of hazing aside from the bulleted points, any reasonable person would assume other examples of hazing would follow the themes of the bullets, which all seem to involve dangerous, abusive, and prohibited behavior. One would not think a coffee chat with an upperclassman would fall under this category. If this upperclassman had been a professor, a job recruiter, or a DSL, would this also be considered hazing? Likely not. Moreover, Student 4 reported their DSL told them that they only received a Dean’s Warning for hazing because the event happened before their Social Contract violation. Had this occurred after, the DSL said, this student would have faced ***additional DP or suspension.***

Suspension. ***For coffee.***

Moreover, Student 4 reported each interview with the PI was mentally draining. They noted that during interviews, the PI pried for personal and extraneous details, including asking for the Student’s fall 2020 off-campus address and “asking every single detail about what I had been doing for the past year,” including everyone this student had talked to. Student 4 noted that throughout the interview process, the PI “imposed assumptions upon me.” In one instance, Student 4 told the PI that they went to get coffee with an upperclassmen mentor in the same

---

<sup>16</sup> RRR

social organization. The PI insisted that this Student must have felt hazed under these circumstances. Student 4 stated the PI called them, unannounced, at random times, and expected them to reply to emails within an hour, even when they were in class. Given that students can face disciplinary actions if they are non-compliant, each instance this student was summoned effectively forced them to postpone everything they were doing and clear their schedule for an interview. This severely impeded their ability to concentrate and study as they were plagued by the constant fear of investigation.

To place Student 4's situation into perspective, let us assume that this student was summoned to chat with investigators at a rate of once per week. Given that a semester at Princeton is twelve weeks, this student spent over nearly half of their semester going through an extremely stressful and uncomfortable investigatory process. This is absurd and unduly burdensome on anyone who experienced it. Students that come to Princeton do not do so with the impression that at any point they might be interrogated by a squad of ad-hoc PIs using tactics that make them akin to a secret police force. For students who are barely adults, this kind of treatment is abusive. This would not even pass in a court of law.

## **Section VII: The continuation of harsh policing this semester**

Many of the practices that occurred last semester are being continued currently. We describe some cases, from this semester, below.

### ***A.) Discrepancies in Punishment for Violations of the Same Nature***

When Vice President Calhoun addressed the Undergraduate Student Government this fall, she assured them that last semester's harsh discipline was anomalous. However, the harsh policing and unequal sentencing committed last semester continues this year. Student 8 and

Student 9 both received 3 months of DP for playing drinking games, with water in the cups. They were not under the impression that they were playing a drinking game. In fact, these students made a reasonable mistake. The RRR they read, which is publicly available online, did not contain a definition of drinking game as including cups with water. Another RRR does in fact specify this. This discrepancy is an administrative failure. Students should not be held responsible for errors administrators make because of failure to proofread their documents. Students are not omniscient.

Only a few weeks apart from Student 8 and 9's incident, Student 8 heard that a plethora of students involved in an investigation only received a Deans' Warning for also playing drinking games. When Student 8 asked their Director of Student Life about the RRR discrepancy and reports of discrepancies in their punishment versus others for similar violations compared to others, they received a shocking answer. Their DSL said the instances involving groups of students were subject to mitigating circumstances. The DSL described these circumstances as the "size of the group" involved.

This discrepancy reflects the RCDB selectively adheres to principles of strict enforcement where there is no strength in numbers. It is easy to target individual students.. The RCDB's unofficial policy of diluting punishment when large groups are involved is reflective of direct discrimination.

Moreover, the mere fact that Student 8's DSL admitted that the size of a group was determinant of a lesser punishment reflects that the RCDB is aware that doling out excessive punishments for minor violations is problematic. Indeed, handing dozens of students DP for playing beer pong would be nothing short of ridiculous and scandalous. Just because the RCDB

**can** get away with giving this sort of punishment to isolated individuals does not mean they **should**.

Moreover, another student, Student 10 reported that they only received a Dean's Warning for participating in drinking games. It appears that the RCDB's decision to give different punishments for violations of the same nature was arbitrary. Student 10 noted that they received in writing:

*“although the normal penalty for participation in drinking games is 3 months of disciplinary probation, the Board has decided to issue you a Dean's Warning.”*

The justification for the decision was that Student 10 did not understand that they might have been “playing a drinking game.” Student 10, while relieved they did not receive DP, still felt uneasy. They felt they could have very well been on the receiving end of a harsher sentence, based on what they had heard about the RCDB's penchant for whimsical punishment.

Indeed, Student 10's fears are corroborated by the discrepancies between punishments for students such as Students 8 and 9 and Student 10. In the case of Student 10, their punishment seems reasonable: they were unaware that their actions constituted a drinking game. Students 8 and 9, however, were in the exact same situation. They were unaware that their actions constituted a drinking game. Why, then, did they receive DP for something that should have warranted a warning?

### ***B.) The Continued Use of Invasive Interviewing Tactics***

Student 10 was also interviewed by a PI, and the experience they described corroborates the theme of inappropriate questioning. Student 10 noted that the PI asked invasive questions, asking them about what they were wearing and asking them intensely about other students, to the point of discomfort.



## Section VIII: Recommendations

The treatment of students last semester was egregious. Moreover, the consequences of lengthy terms of DP are severe. We urge the administration to take immediate action and provide the following recommendations.

- 1.) Acquit all students placed on DP for Social Contract or Social Contract related violations
  - a. At this point, punishment appears to have been handed out so arbitrarily, and pursuant to such a flawed process, that it should be erased from student records. Moreover, given that the damages caused by these violations were minimal (the infection rate last semester remained low), this seems fitting and proportionate.
  - b. The University should acquit testing violations. It should re-examine DP for individuals accused of hosting social gatherings and lighten penalties. Alternatively, they should take it off of students' permanent records.
  
- 2.) Collect data on tangible damages of harsh policing, including the impact on mental health, academic performance, and consequences of disclosure. Compensate students for damages.
  - a. Even if the University erases DP from last semester, they must find a way to compensate students who have already been damaged by their disciplinary experience or by excessive penalties being made part of their record. This compensation should include a more vigorous commitment to mental health on campus and connecting students with care providers that can provide them with timely services. Moreover, compensation should also include written letters of clarification or reconsideration commending student character or detailing the arbitrarily harsh and unfair nature of punishment last semester.

- 3.) Reduce all violations of alcohol policy this semester to a Dean's Warning
  - a. Currently, RCDB procedure appears to selectively discriminate when it comes to alcohol violations, with a tendency to more harshly police smaller groups and individuals. For alcohol policy violations of the same nature, we suggest a least common denominator remedy: penalties for all should be reduced to the lowest level of punishment currently assigned (a Dean's Warning).
- 4.) Provide students undergoing investigation a pro-bono attorney or some form of third party support to help them navigate the RCDB's unduly burdensome and confusing process
- 5.) Eliminate the anonymous ethics point tip line for non-separable offenses and require such students reporting misconduct to declare their names.
  - a. This will eliminate potential gaslighting and give individuals a right to face their accusers.