

CLA DEI Committee Statement on PUPD Incident

On February 4, Purdue University student Adonis Tuggle was involved in a violent arrest by Purdue University Police Officer Jon Selke. The arrest was captured on cellphone video by a woman believed to be Tuggle's girlfriend and circulated on social media websites such as GroupMe, Instagram, Reddit, and TikTok. The incident was picked up by TMZ on February 9 and quickly became national news, with journal outlets such as the Washington Post, New York Post, and USA Today reporting on the arrest in quick succession. In national news coverage, the incident was widely characterized as an incident of racial targeting, in which a white police officer used excessive force in a needlessly aggressive confrontation with a student without attempting to de-escalate the situation or ascertain the details of the situation to which he was called.

As captured in the video, the officer pinned Tuggle down to the ground in the snow and smothered his neck and face with his elbow, while yelling aggressively at both Tuggle and the woman who recorded the incident on her cellphone. Purdue students and campus groups including the Purdue Student Union, Black Student Union, and Black Cultural Center were quick to condemn the action as an incident of police brutality against a fellow Purdue student. They also highlighted the fact that the student was Black, and that his treatment at the hands of the police officer mirrored national incidents of excessive use-of-force against Black people. The official response from the University, on the other hand, has been tepid, the racial element of the arrest downplayed, and the call for release of evidence slow.

If we listen to the students, we can hear that the measures that they are calling for are entirely sound, just, reasonable, and of benefit to the wider campus community. These measures include increased training by Purdue University Police Officers in de-escalation methods, preventative action, and crisis intervention, reallocation of resources to psychological and counseling services, and greater accountability and transparency in reviews of University Police conduct. We, as the College of Liberal Arts, should support these demands to the fullest of our ability. We should also support campus organizations that promote Black culture, achievement, and diverse contributions to society, such as the Black Cultural Center and Black Student Union, promote events that center Black arts, including literature, music, and film, and work to include and promote these same arts in our classes. It is important that Black voices be heard on our campus and that Black students be made to feel as welcome and central to our community as all other students.

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Co-Chair of CLA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

February 26, 2022