

An Open Letter to Indiana University President Pamela Whitten and Indiana University Bloomington Provost and Executive Vice President Rahul Shrivastav

Monday, April 29, 2024

We, the undersigned Bloomington City Council Members, are writing to express our common opinion regarding recent actions of the Indiana University administration in regard to peaceful demonstrations in Dunn Meadow on the Indiana University Bloomington campus. Since 1969, IU policy has allowed peaceful demonstrations in Dunn Meadow, including those using tents and signs, on a broad range of issues. On April 24, 2024, one day prior to a planned rally, President Pamela Whitten convened an ad-hoc committee to review and rapidly change these long standing rules and norms regarding free speech in Dunn Meadow.

According to President Whitten's letter to faculty members the following day: "The committee affirmed the right of peaceful protest, with the additional recommendation that temporary or permanent installation of structures in Dunn Meadow (including, but not limited to posters, tents, etc.) at any time must be approved in advance by the university and, if approved, adhere to the guidelines provided by the university." President Whitten followed through on these recommendations to change the policy. These changes were made without transparency or adequate process to involve affected stakeholders, including IU faculty, staff, and students, most of whom are residents of Bloomington.

This change is a severe departure from over 50 years of IU policy, as well as IU and Bloomington community norms regarding free speech and nonviolent protest. The context under which the new policy was instituted indicates that the new rules were meant to directly target the April 25 rally and its subject matter, violating Bloomington residents' First Amendment rights. **We denounce these actions and demand that the new policy be immediately rescinded.**

We understand that President Whitten requested that Indiana State Police enforce the newly revised policies regarding daytime tents in Dunn Meadow on April 25 and on subsequent days. According to the many videos and photos taken during the protests, and the reports from people at the scene, the Indiana State Police response used force far in excess of what was necessary to enforce the new campus rules. The large number of police officers, the weapons displayed and used by the officers, and their forceful actions to arrest protesters only served to escalate the situation. Their violent response to peaceful protest is unacceptable. **We demand that no criminal charges be brought against peaceful protesters, that related bans from the IUB campus be immediately revoked, and that all disciplinary charges against peaceful protesters in the IU system be dropped.**

We, as elected representatives of the residents of Bloomington (including IU students, faculty, and staff), decry the display of and use of force by the Indiana State Police during the rally as well as the IU administration's denial of free speech rights in Dunn Meadow. We want our residents to be safe, *especially* as they exercise their civil liberties. We swore an oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment. The actions of IU President Whitten's

administration in recent days have been harmful to our community. We expect better.
Bloomington deserves better.

Sincerely,

Isabel Piedmont-Smith, District 1, President

Andy Ruff, At Large, Vice President

Matt Flaherty, At Large

Kate Rosenbarger, District 2

Hopi Stosberg, District 3, Parliamentarian

Dave Rollo, District 4

Courtney Daily, District 5

Sydney Zulich, District 6