



# NORTHWESTERN GRADUATE WORKERS

Dear NUGW members and the broader Northwestern community,

On Tuesday, November 9, Northwestern administration sent an [email](#) to the Northwestern community in which they declared a [recent protest at Ryan Field](#) a "violation of [the university's] demonstration policy," citing safety concerns. When we received this email, students were still reeling over recent events in which community members' safety and well-being were explicitly endangered, including: vandalization of decorations on the Rock celebrating Native American Heritage Month with [racist hate messages](#), [multiple reports](#) of alleged druggings at university fraternities and off-campus housing, and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic while mental health resources to support students remain [understaffed](#) and [inaccessible](#).

Every few weeks, we receive yet another tepid response from Northwestern's administrators about their purported "[unequivocal support](#)," their "[unwavering commitment to equity](#)," to "[accountability](#)," and "[the safety of everyone in our community](#)." While unsurprising, the violence that has transpired since the start of the fall quarter demonstrates that these repeated commitments ultimately ring hollow. Instead, the lack of willingness to engage with students' demands and the avoidance of concrete action or material commitment to truly advancing "[a change in culture](#)" makes visible the administration's tolerance of the anti-Black and anti-Indigenous institutional culture at our University, if not a commitment to it.

We condemn Northwestern's [response](#) to student activists' powerful peaceful protest on Ryan Field, as well as their effort to minimize the harm caused by the desecration of the Rock, [for the second year in a row](#). **Crucially, we also understand that these two specific events fit within a larger institutional framework that functions to maintain the status quo of class hierarchy and white supremacy. The responses from senior administrators function to silence and threaten the very people on this campus whom they claim to support.**

NUGW stands in strength and solidarity with the Native American and Indigenous Student Alliance (NAISA) as well as the student activists who protested at Ryan Field (NU Community Not Cops, Fossil Free NU, NU Dissenters, Students for Justice in Palestine, and Students Organizing for Labor Rights). We support our peers who devote themselves to uplifting marginalized communities, addressing environmental concerns, and creating an equitable and sustainable institution for all through grassroots organizing.

*Northwestern University Graduate Workers (NUGW)*

[Page 2 - analysis of administration responses](#)

[Page 3 - actions to support and restatement of demands](#)

The administration's prioritization of institutional status quo and monetary gain over justice and students' well-being has been thoroughly demonstrated by their communications. Reactions to the emails sent by Northwestern administration were swift, with community members immediately recognizing glaring discrepancies in the university's responses to these recent incidents.

Northwestern leadership did not initially issue a university-wide email regarding the vandalism of the Rock, instead hiding their message of support [on their website](#). In response to community anger, an email was sent on Thursday, November 11. In this email, provost Kathleen Hagerty stated that "one of Northwestern's central missions is for our community members to learn and grow, including me" in lieu of an apology. Notably, no reference to this central mission was made in the email regarding protesters. Similarly, the focus in the drugging-related emails was on victim care. Accountability for the perpetrators of the crimes was not mentioned beyond temporary suspension of fraternity events.

In contrast, Northwestern's response to protestors on Ryan Field was actively punitive, threatening "suspension, expulsion, or legal action" against individuals accused of violating the university's demonstration policy. This policy encourages "freedom of expression," but only in ways that do not disrupt the "regularly scheduled activities of the University" claiming that this would endanger the "safety and well-being of all involved." However, the hypocritical and sham nature of this argument is easily proven: [When fans stormed Ryan Field following a football win in 2014](#), Northwestern voiced no such safety concerns. Clearly, they perceived a danger in the specific messaging of the recent protest, not in the storming of the field.

The suggestion that protest should not disrupt the day-to-day operations of institutions is a fundamental misunderstanding of what protest is. Protest is meant to disrupt business-as-usual, to make space when there is no space given by the oppressor, to make voices heard that are ignored, and to make visible the injustices that are being hidden.

The difference between these reactions demonstrates Northwestern's skewed perspective on protecting the community. The wide distribution of the aggressively toned email about the Ryan Field protesters enhances its purpose of intimidation when protesters were asking for more support and protection. The message to the vandalizers stands in stark contrast: a toned down admonishment and an invitation to engage with Indigenous scholarship. Moreover, the leadership note precludes any responsibility of the perpetrators, declaring their lack of education in Native American and Indigenous history and experience as the reason for the hate crime.

Who is part of the community the university is protecting here? Whose safety seems to be their main concern? Administrative responses center non-Indigenous, non-Black, and especially white community members, as they frame white-supremacist violence as a learning opportunity for white Northwesterners. Provost Hagerty's amended message responding to the defacing of the Rock perpetuates this harmful pattern, claiming her need to "learn and grow" as an excuse instead of taking responsibility for enabling a harmful campus climate. Furthermore, these messages refuse responsibility by substituting a patronizing emphasis on community support, and routine copy-pasting of mental health resources, which forces the onus of wellbeing and safety on harmed community members instead.



As an organization focused on improving graduate working conditions, we recognize that the most marginalized communities are also those overburdened with the work of creating an equitable environment for their well-being. Likewise, it is student activists and allies who do the work of provoking change where institutional negligence, if not active malice, reigns supreme.

We call upon the university to listen to the solutions students have already proposed and acknowledge the labor that has gone into making these proposals. Failure to do so only further demonstrates the hypocrisy and structural violence that makes such proposals necessary. NAISA, in the face of traumatic acts against their members, has already done the immense logistical and emotional labor of processing these events to create a comprehensive response and action plan. They have already [released their own statement](#), and addressed [how NU's response hid more harm than good](#).

[As written here](#), their solutions to address the lack of meaningful change are clear: NAISA demands that the university create a plan that fosters a welcoming environment for Indigenous students and that they create a scholarship for Cheyenne and Arapaho descendants. In light of recent events, they demand that the people who committed the vandalism on the Rock engage in restorative justice practices to account for their actions. To address these issues in the future, NAISA calls for a Crisis Response Team to handle bias-related incidents.

**To support NAISA, please email the administration listed at the bottom of [this document](#) summarizing the demands in your own words.**

**To support the students at Ryan Field, please email the same Northwestern administration to demand that the Board of Trustees meet with student organizers.** We would also like to uplift the other demands of the student groups below:

- **NU Community Not Cops** [demands](#) that Northwestern divest from law enforcement and invest in institutions that support Black students on campus.
- **NU Dissenters** [demands](#) that Northwestern divest from war, policing, and surveillance industries, and instead invest in their students through scholarships for low-income students.
- **Fossil Free NU** [demands](#) that Northwestern divest from fossil fuel-related companies and reinvest in renewable energy companies.
- **Students for Justice in Palestine** [demands](#) that Northwestern divest from corporations that violate human rights.
- **Students Organizing for Labor Rights** [demands](#) Northwestern continue to fulfill service worker contract demands won earlier this year without laying off workers.

**If you want to get further involved, these groups regularly post about their meetings, events, and calls for mutual aid on their social media accounts.**

The university's actions speak louder than their words, ignoring the voices of their community in favor of [gross profits](#). This is why NUGW stands in solidarity with fellow students working to create a just world. As Northwestern administration and the Board of Trustees continue to refuse to listen to their demands, it remains clear that real change is in the hands of students who do the real work towards meaningful change on campus. It is an important reminder that we claim our rights as workers and stand strong together. Collectively, we have the power to bring about broader structural and institutional changes that benefit all students and workers across Northwestern.

