

EDITORIAL: Hindsight isn't good enough. Hold them accountable.

The University has made it clear that they are not capable of containing the virus — at this point, there needs to be accountability

By Editorial Board

February 20, 2021



Students, frustrated by the huge spike in COVID-19 cases amongst students, took to social media this past week to express their anger with those continuing to gather in large crowds.

Courtesy @uvachicks Instagram

The Editorial Board — along with most of the student body — is tired. We are tired of the lack of accountability [certain students and groups](#) are facing for continually disregarding COVID-19 policies. We are tired of the University constantly attempting to evade any responsibility in their actions. We are tired of University administration's refusal to listen to its students' fears and concerns and condemn the chapters of the Inter-Fraternity Council and Inter-Sorority Council that have put lives at risk with their privilege and ignorance of the dangers of the virus. We are, quite simply, tired of waiting for the University to care about us.

Earlier this week, University administration announced major temporary operational changes in response to the large spike in COVID-19 cases on Grounds. This past Tuesday, 229 students tested positive — by far a new daily record. Even scarier, this number represented over 10 percent of the new positive cases in the Commonwealth. As we attempt to understand how things have gotten so out of control so quickly, we are reminded of the University's failure to prevent the fault that fraternities and sororities have in this after in-person events of these groups over the past two weeks.

The Cavalier Daily investigated the claims against some IFC and ISC chapters. An anonymous source affiliated with an IFC chapter “can say with a good degree of confidence that most fraternities broke the six-person rule once or twice, at least.” Combined with numerous reports of large gatherings from Greek life chapters and photo and [video evidence](#) of disregard for rules, this paints a picture of what many students already knew — many fraternities and sororities believe they are held to a different standard. The University messed up, and they refuse to acknowledge this.

Students [took to social media](#) this past week to express their anger with those continuing to gather in large crowds and with the University's disregard of these students. Certain chapters of the IFC and ISC, in particular, [hosted](#) in-person bid day events this past Sunday, while many

fraternities also even held in-person rush events. Despite a six-person gathering limit, many fraternities were encouraged by ambiguous rules from the University – which allowed for in-person rush events that followed COVID-19 guidelines, despite the [guidelines](#) prohibiting gatherings to six inhabitants – to bring groups of rushing students into their houses of over six inhabitants. Many are even calling on the University to [suspend](#) non-compliant chapters until the end of the semester.

As this surge in cases continues – and as we wait for the incubation period to finish to get a better insight of the effects of in-person bid day and rush events – the fact remains that there were fraternities that blatantly ignored the rules. Remember that the University was complicit in the behavior of Greek-life organizations this past week, and that this complicity directly endangered the lives and well-being of thousands of students and even more members of the Charlottesville community.

The University has since pushed a narrative of general student body noncompliance. At a recent Town Hall, University administration continued to highlight that while fraternities likely did cause some of the increases, the uptick in cases was widespread both on- and off-Grounds. They showed a map of where cases have been traced in an attempt to place the blame on the general student body – yet, many of these cases appear to be in off-Grounds locations near the presence of Greek life. In addition, regardless of any widespread cases, this shift of responsibility ignores a key aspect of the spread – fraternities willingly acted in a manner that has been known to increase the spread. These were not innocent or small mistakes – they were large gatherings of individuals who do not care about the dangers in their actions. Administrators' attempts to ignore that certain students – driven by their privilege and historic lack of accountability – willfully inflicted exponential amounts of harm onto others in the community.

At this same Town Hall, Ryan noted that in hindsight, administration should have known that fraternity rush would have caused at least some uptick in cases. However, hindsight is not good enough in the midst of a global

pandemic. People are dying – there is no room for error, and the administration knows this.

The IFC has since released a [statement](#) via their Instagram account regarding the recent accusations against their chapters. However, this statement means absolutely nothing without real and honest accountability for those chapters that broke the rules time and time again. Further, the statement reads, “Some reports were preemptive and allowed the Governing Board to shut down events that would have broken policy before they happened.” This is a situation where stopping “some reports” is simply not good enough – the pandemic, despite what some students may wish to believe, is currently causing massive issues within local communities. Further, in a widely-circulated [internal message](#), the IFC president asks members to cease in-person activity, as “the consequences are potentially disastrous for the IFC.” The question therefore remains – do these organizations care at all that their actions could have incredibly “disastrous” consequences on the local community?

Maybe the University could not, as it says, stop the decision of a student-run organization to have off-Grounds gatherings that were supposed to follow guidelines. However, it believed a governing body of 13 fraternity men could hold over 1,700 members across 32 chapters accountable and did not adequately step in to enforce its own policy over these students’ behavior. Yet, the University stance suggests that they will continue to avoid holding Greek life responsible.

At the end of the day, students have been bringing these concerns to the University’s administration for weeks now. Students knew from the moment in-person bid day plans were announced that the consequences could be dire. The data is not going to definitively show what caused this rise in numbers – that’s simply not possible. But two weeks of wide scale in-person recruitment went essentially unchecked. Fraternities and sororities, of course, deserve to be called out – and reported – when they break the rules. But it is frustrating that the University’s administration continues to ignore their responsibility.

Use this widespread criticism of the Greek community and the spike in cases to remind yourself to remain diligent. While the actions of many IFC and ISC chapters were reckless, selfish and showed a complete disregard for those around them, noncompliance with COVID policies does not start and end with Greek life. We ask our readers – especially those who still do not grasp the severity of our actions on the local community – to look at the [numbers](#). You will find an alarming number of hospitalizations within the University’s hospital over the past weeks. To some of these students who spent their weekends disregarding COVID guidelines, the pandemic is a joke – to the 40 patients currently in-house at U.Va. Hospital, this is a matter of life or death.

The Cavalier Daily Editorial Board is composed of the Executive Editor, the Editor-in-Chief, the two Opinion Editors, their Senior Associate and an Opinion Columnist. The board can be reached at eb@cavalierdaily.com.

EDITORIAL: We could be happier, President Ryan

The University must ensure the Board doesn't go back on its word to remove symbols of hate around Grounds

By Editorial Board

April 23, 2021



Remove the Whispering Wall and trauma its continued presence signifies for marginalized students. Photo by [Ava MacBlane](#) | The Cavalier Daily

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Recommendations by the **Committee** on Naming and Memorials were supported by the Board of Visitors on April 13. The recommendations include digitally contextualizing statutes and memorials at the University to create a “digital historical stratigraphy.” This aims to compile a complete, “informed perspective” of monuments for students, visitors and community members. University President Jim Ryan **said** he “couldn’t be happier” about this recommendation, with the committee ruling digital contextualization the most “practicable option.” According to the decision, digital contextualization of the historic landscape allows more detail and flexibility given the limited space around Grounds that physical markers would intrude upon.

But we could be happier, Ryan — in a society structured on racism, dismantling white supremacy calls us to think beyond practicable options. Digital contextualization is inadequate, and the University must ensure student demands are met, Confederate monuments are removed and the Board doesn’t go back on its **word** to **eradicate** symbols of hate on Grounds.

The committee recommended professional historians, students, Charlottesville residents and alumni work together on digital contextualization through a working group established by Ryan. This would include creating QR codes to access the history of statues around Grounds, such as the Thomas Jefferson statue in front of the Rotunda. This would eventually develop into a “walking tour of statues and memorials.” Though the committee **noted** the tour’s narrative would cover the full history of the commission, funding, construction and “informed treatment” of the artist for all memorials and statues, it isn’t enough.

Prof. Jalane Schmidt and Jefferson School Executive Director Andrea Douglass [demonstrate](#) the power of technology in contextualization with the [Marked by These Monuments](#) audio tour of Charlottesville. However, this resource is a tool to push for removal of monuments to white supremacy. It was never meant to be the solution. A walking tour designed through digital contextualization without further action would allow the true history of white supremacy around Grounds to remain hidden.

The contextualization of statutes — such as those of Thomas Jefferson — should be as in your face as the physical monuments are. Placing QR codes on statues and memorials rather than physical contextualization is performative activism of the highest degree. This method of contextualization is also inherently inaccessible, as users would need a smartphone in order to access the information provided. It reinforces the University's pattern of hiding — rather than taking accountability for — its history and its tendency to push the onus of learning onto students. If the historic landscape made room for statues that perpetuate a racist narrative, it must now dedicate room for markers to contextualize them. In addition to this, there are some statues and memorials that even contextualization is not enough. All Confederate statutes — such as the one in the [cemetery](#) — need to be removed, just as other forms of dedicated to or memorialization of the Confederacy must be rededicated or removed as well.

The Board will meet in June regarding the Frank Hume Memorial Fountain — often referred to as the [Whispering Wall](#) — following Wednesday's community listening session with the Naming and Memorials Committee. While the Board [voted](#) to remove or rededicate the wall in September, the fate of the monument remains in question. With organizers such as the Minority Rights Coalition [adamantly](#) calling for its [removal](#), we believe the answer is clear — the Hume Memorial must come down.

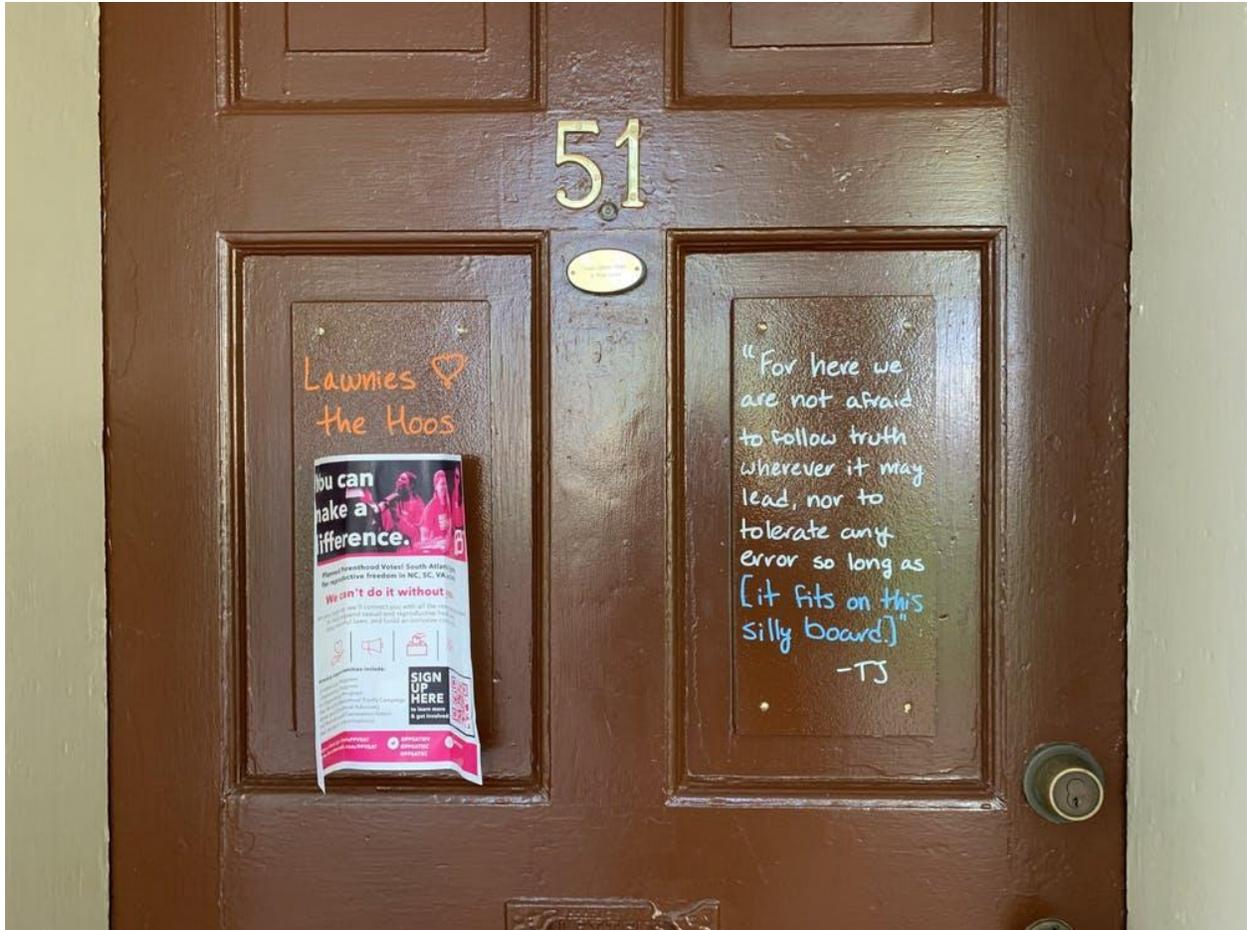
Written across the Hume Memorial Fountain are the words “A Memorial To The Honorable Frank Hume – A Devoted Virginian Who Served His Native State In Civil War And Legislative Hall.” The word “honorable” should not be used to describe a man who fought for the Confederacy and protection of slavery and held countless events romanticizing the Confederate efforts after the Civil War’s end. This monument is a disgusting romanticization of the nation’s past located in a high-traffic area on Grounds and even shown to prospective students during many tours of the University. Considering Hume had no ties to the University, there is no question that the fountain is yet another vestige of the institution’s historic glorification of white supremacy. We urge the University to do more than just rededicate the Whispering Wall – remove the memorial and trauma its continued presence signifies for marginalized students.

The University cannot continue to perpetuate and hide its racist history. The Board must listen to community demands and remove the Frank Hume Memorial Fountain. Students are forced to walk past these memorials every day – a slab of stone should never take priority over the mental wellbeing and sense of belonging of those who walk through Grounds.

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EDITORIAL: Size matters – eliminate new restrictions on expression

Current restrictions threaten to deter students from criticizing the University



Lawn residents are **limited** to signage within the four corners of the boards on their doors, which is sometimes smaller than the size of a standard piece of paper.

Photo by Simran Arora | The Cavalier Daily

By Editorial Board
September 29, 2021

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Over the past year, Lawn room doors have been a site of [heavy tension](#) on Grounds. Last fall, several Lawn residents put up signs criticizing the University. Since then, the University has imposed stringent regulations. Now, Lawn residents are [limited](#) to signage within the four corners of the boards on their Lawn doors, which is sometimes smaller than the size of a standard piece of paper. These restrictions were defensively adopted in response to a series of highly publicized incidents and are a direct threat to students' right to free speech and free expression. The restrictions introduced have the potential [to deter](#) students from criticizing the University at all, for fear of increased sanctioning. For this reason, the administration must reconsider the current excessive Lawn signage restrictions.

Historically, Lawn room doors have been a place of community and sharing. Residents put up signs as a way of expressing their passions and sharing them with the University community and anyone on Grounds. We cannot forget that Lawn residents are supposed to represent a carefully curated reflection of diverse experiences and values across the University, chosen for their holistic involvement in the Charlottesville and University communities. Given this, the Lawn rooms are intended to serve as a forum for exchange between the University and by extension the wider Charlottesville community at large. Therefore, the benefits of open communication and expression should not be understated. However, it is naive and condescending to think that Lawn room signs are intended to solely promote positive community building. They are also a prominent platform for publicizing students' criticisms.

In the past week, Housing and Residence Life followed through on enforcing the [new restrictions](#). Fourth-year College student Emma Camp was [required](#) to remove her sign — which was nearly the size of the door itself and included the full text of the First Amendment. Another Lawn resident was [directed](#) to trim his 8.5 x 11" Planned Parenthood poster by one inch to fit on his message board — a space smaller than a standard sheet of printer paper. These two instances capture the absurdity of these new rules. Neither sign had a "threatening nature" — the [alleged](#) reason for previous Lawn sign removal. Rather, both signs were opportunities for the residents to speak out about important topics.

Unfortunately, these restrictions are even more questionable when one realizes that they have all come about in response to speech by Black and Brown students. The [original signs](#) that began this conflict are now infamous. The [first](#) critical sign condemned white supremacy with the phrases "F—k UVA," "UVA Operating Costs: KKKops, Genocide Slavery, Disability, Black and Brown Life." The [next](#) — which the University forcibly removed — displayed an image of a flaming Rotunda draped with a white hood, resembling that of the Klu Klux Klan, with a grim reaper holding a scythe and police belt with the initials "UPD." Both signs were clear protests of white supremacy, police brutality and institutional racism

at the University. Ultimately, the University removed the second sign under the pretense that it “advocate[d] physical violence, and [could] spur it” – a blatant overstep by the administration on what was clearly a form of symbolic speech. Even if the University’s ruling were true, the same characterization cannot be made of the signs taken down this semester. The University has baselessly inducted a new wave of content and size restrictions on signs in response to Black and Brown students protesting discrimination.

While not explicit, the University’s decisions have a clear undertone of content restrictions. The University has taken action restricting lawn signage in response to content they did not approve of. The restrictions are hypocritical. Just last June, the Board of Visitors endorsed a [statement](#) of the University’s commitment to free speech, “unequivocally” affirming its dedication. In the past year alone, the University [dropped](#) from sixth to 22nd place on the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education’s College Free Speech Rankings list.

We must decide what type of community we want on Grounds. As students, we should continue to demand creative avenues of expression from the University. Lawn room signs – large, bold and expressive – are a part of what makes the University so special, giving fourth-year students a unique platform and the privilege to address anyone who walks past their room. Regardless of whether one agrees with the content of the message, the University should not limit this form of speech. Indeed, last semester President Jim Ryan echoed this sentiment, [writing](#), “I believe it is a matter of principle and the obligation, especially of universities, to protect speech even when it is offensive, and to stand firm against pressure to ignore the Constitution.” He went on to add that “[u]pholding fundamental principles against temptation or pressure to contravene them can be a hard thing to do, but I believe it is the right thing to do.” Today these ill-advised restrictions seem almost to be antithetical to the very position President Ryan took. Apparently the timeline for “standing firm” expires after 12 months.

The University must reduce Lawn room sign restrictions. Free speech is a critical component of education at the University and any liberal arts campus. While there are indeed practical safety limitations to impose on Lawn room signs, the current restrictions are excessive and ridiculous. Lawn residents have a particularly unique platform to reach those in the University community – the University should not limit their free speech.

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