



November 30, 2020



*President Wendy Raymond on the November 4 Zoom meeting with strike organizers*

## Contentious Meeting Between Admin, Organizers, Showcases Obstacles to Resolving Strike

BY DAVID EDELMAN ON NOVEMBER 8, 2020

On the afternoon of November 5, senior Haverford staff and student organizers sat down for their long-anticipated open meeting. Over a marathon two and a half hour session, they went point-by-point through each of the twelve demands from [the organizers' statement](#), plus two new demands relating to Indigenous communities and the Black Cultural Center on campus.

President Raymond had proposed the meeting as part of her [November 2 response](#) to the organizers' demands. But a request from the strike organizers to send the agenda for the meeting 24 hours in advance went unheeded, foreshadowing how contentious the meeting would end up proving. Ultimately, President Raymond released a bare-bones agenda and Zoom link to the community only 25 minutes before the meeting began at 3 pm.

Despite the short notice, the 300-person limit on the Zoom call was quickly reached with a mix of students, faculty, and staff. Besides senior staff members, the chair and vice-chair of the Board of Managers were also in attendance. (A recording and transcript of the meeting are available [here](#).)

President Raymond opened the meeting with an apology for the college's failure to support its BIPOC students, past and present. "We have fallen short of our stated principles of equity, integrity, trust, concern, and respect," she acknowledged.

Acceding to one of the organizers' original demands, President Raymond pledged to step down as Chief Diversity Officer, effective immediately. Provost Linda Strong-Leek will take over as interim CDO until December 1. While the organizers were not pleased with this choice, explaining that they wanted someone from outside the administration who would be accountable to students, President Raymond emphasized that the current structure will be temporary and invited students to join the group that will develop a permanent model for Haverford's CDO.

President Raymond also announced the creation of an anti-racism accountability group to oversee the changes demanded by organizers, with a membership composed of students, faculty, and administrators.

The floor was then turned over to the student organizers—and they came out swinging. With cameras turned off and display names set to "Henry Drinker" and "James Magill" (among others), they announced, "We have named ourselves after some of the old white men who have made Haverford the racist institution it is today."

Building off the land acknowledgment that was included in the organizers' original manifesto, organizers unveiled their first new demand: a reparations program for the descendants of Indigenous peoples displaced from Pennsylvania, including preferential consideration for admissions at Haverford and one full scholarship for an Indigenous student in each class year. They called for this program to have a budget of \$300,000 annually, which would require an endowment of approximately \$6 million to sustain in perpetuity.

In the [master spreadsheet](#) tracking Haverford's commitments on anti-racism that President Raymond sent to the entire community the day after the meeting, the college promised to increase its outreach to Indigenous students and "articulate admission preference for students from the Lenni-Lenape nation and students descending from Native peoples original to Pennsylvania state territories."

Organizers next discussed reforms to the Committee on Student Standing and Programs (CSSP), which places students on academic warning. In a letter sent to the community on November 7, members of the CSSP apologized for “the role that this committee has played in perpetuating the institutionalized racism that exists at Haverford” and announced a plan to rework the committee’s structure to better support vulnerable students.

Without much fanfare, another major academic change was announced on the master spreadsheet. With the blessing of the Educational Policy Committee, the grading system from the spring will apply this semester as well: all students will receive a Pass/Fail grade, with the option to uncover the letter grade underneath if they so choose.

While administrators reaffirmed that they would not punish students for attending protests off campus, they declined the organizers’ call to redirect institutional funds to local community organizations, calling it incompatible with the college’s mission. Instead, they pointed to efforts by the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship to increase its outreach in Philadelphia—a suggestion the organizers dismissed as primarily intended to benefit students’ careers.

Next up was Demand 6, where speakers expressed frustration with the surveillance of students of color on campus. Singled out for criticism was the practice of carding Black students to prove their identity, particularly when white Main Line residents have routinely broken campus access rules during the pandemic. President Raymond promised to work with Campus Safety to audit its COVID-19 reporting data and to review its policies to guard against racial bias.

The college approved of the organizers’ suggestion under Demand 7 to create a digital archive preserving the work of Black women. The Libraries and Alumni Office, who are taking the lead on this project, pledged to release a timeline for it by the end of the year.

As the frustrations in the meeting broke out into the open, one first-year addressed Interim Dean of the College Joyce Bylander directly: “I’ve been disappointed by the lack of support we’ve received from you, a Black woman... You haven’t stood up for us, and I doubt that you ever will,” she said.

“I hear your pain,” responded Dean Bylander, “I am not in your shoes, but every day, I live as a proud Black woman, and I am here, in my third month, looking forward to working with you and making Haverford a better place.”

Perhaps wanting to avoid the tone-deafness of the email on the death of Walter Wallace Jr. that sparked the protest and strike, throughout the meeting, administrators—especially

President Raymond—made a conscious effort to choose their words slowly and carefully, acknowledging the organizers’ justified anger towards the college. Yet if anything, that deference seemed to only embolden the organizers, who expressed outrage at the fact that it took a campus-wide strike to get the college to seriously consider changes that many students of color have been advocating for years or even decades.

Organizers next proposed a body of students, faculty, and administrators that would hear student complaints about discriminatory behavior by professors. While administrators agreed that the Faculty Affairs and Planning Committee (FAPC) would publish a framework around this demand by the end of January 2021, they declined to specifically endorse the organizers’ proposal, noting in the master spreadsheet that faculty input would be required.

On Demand 9, President Raymond reiterated the college’s commitment to pay students for up to 20 hours of work missed as a result of the strike but refused to extend the cap beyond that point.

At this point, the divergent goals of the two parties became clear. Organizers told the administration they needed a firm commitment from the administration that students participating in the strike would not face academic penalties.

President Raymond said that she could not take this decision out of the hands of individual professors and made it clear that she wanted classes to resume, possibly as soon as Monday. “[The strike] cannot go on very much longer without an enormous negative impact on our ability to provide you a formal college education, which is the mission of Haverford College,” she said, arguing that anti-racism efforts could continue even with the resumption of formal learning.

Perhaps sensing that their leverage would dissipate if the strike were to end, the organizers expressed their displeasure: “You can’t expect us to just sit here protesting our unjust education and then risk getting kicked out for it,” said one speaker. But President Raymond refused to budge. “If you choose to not participate in your classes, then you are not—and we are not—engaging in your education, and that means there are consequences for your choices,” she responded.

After the spat over the strike, the attendees turned to Demand 11, titled “Stopping the violence against disabled students,” which encompasses a whopping thirteen sub-demands. While President Raymond argued that some of the items, such as an end to mandatory reporting, could not be implemented due to legal restrictions, she promised that Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) and Access and Disability Services (ADS) would respond to all thirteen sub-demands in detail on the master spreadsheet.

Under Demand 12, requesting more support for queer and trans students of color, both sides approved of the consensus for allowing students to see off-campus therapists, particularly those specializing in LGBTQ+ friendly methods. Several speakers commented that a CAPS therapist had previously recommended conversion therapy, which seemed to shock the senior staff: President Raymond deemed it “not acceptable” and later that day, Philip Rosenbaum, director of CAPS, emailed the student body to ask witnesses to come forward so that the school could begin a Title IX investigation.

President Raymond refused one key aspect of Demand 13, a call to sever the college’s relationship with local police departments. On the master spreadsheet, administrators alluded to the fact that this choice would likely increase police presence on campus, not decrease it: “By law, local police have jurisdiction over Haverford’s campus. Relationships allow the College to advocate that law enforcement agencies, over which it has no control, provide services in a manner that is as supportive as possible of Haverford’s community and educational mission.”

Finally, the organizers presented their second new demand: a new building for the Black Cultural Center (BCC). Students outlined how the Ira De A. Reid House, which currently houses the BCC, is plagued by a faulty heating system, water damage, and broken appliances, among other structural problems. Organizers also called for the establishment of a Latinx Center, whose status has been up in the air ever since the protests opposing the proposed sale of La Casa Hispánica last year.

Saying that she had not been aware of the issues with the Ira De A. Reid House, President Raymond apologized and said that Assistant Dean Denise Allison would be working with the Facilities Department to enact repairs as soon as possible. However, she did not commit to a new building for either the BCC or a Latinx Center, inviting students to instead collaborate “on the vision for this space.”

It was only after two hours that the meeting hit its most dramatic moment: “Can you commit to vacating your position if effective change does not occur?” asked one student.

“If the accountability group sets that as a standard and if I fail to deliver on that... absolutely,” responded Chris Mills, Assistant Vice President for College Communications. President Raymond and Provost Strong-Leek echoed that commitment.

As the college community approaches the end of the second weekend of the strike, it remains an open question whether the organizers and the administration will be able to reach an agreement before Monday. If they can’t, professors and students will be faced with

a choice: continue to lose steadily dwindling class time, or cross the picket line against anti-racism efforts that most of them strongly support.

*Stay tuned for Part 2 of our update on the student strike, coming out tomorrow, where we recap the Founders Hall sit-in on the evening of November 4.*

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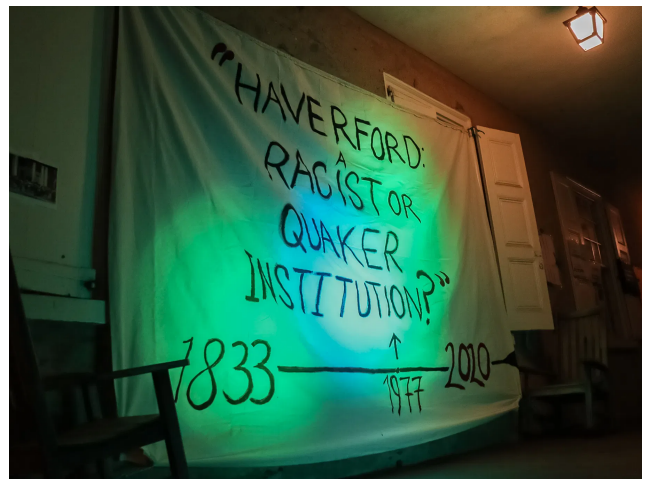
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