

Dear President Jahanian, Dean Casalegno, and Provost Garrett,

We are a coalition of student organizations and individuals, writing to follow up on statements made by the University about how IPS Senior Fellow Richard Grenell's behavior would change to comply with our institutional ethics standards. In an email communication dated August 20, 2020, President Jahanian conveyed the findings of the committee that was appointed to investigate the hiring process of Mr. Grenell. President Jahanian accepted those findings without qualification, including the following:

*"The committee concluded that "the general tone of many of his communications is dismissive and disrespectful of the opinions of others." They noted, however, that there is a question as to "whether we would expect someone coming from outside academia to have abided by its principles beforehand as a condition of employment."...The Committee noted, "we fully expect him to follow all University policies and the more general principles of academic freedom" and that as the head of IPS, it "will be incumbent on [Dr.] Skinner to make sure he understands this requirement and holds him accountable."*

In other words, University officials agreed that Mr. Grenell, during his time as a Senior Fellow, would be held to the normal standards of academia and of our University. In the months since, we have had ample opportunity to observe his behavior. We would like to bring a few issues to the attention of University leaders for the purposes of clarification.

1. Mr. Grenell himself has actively sought to disenfranchise United States citizens, by propagating unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud. In the days following the election, Mr. Grenell has endorsed conspiracy theories on his Twitter account and in press appearances, through the use of phrases like "ballot harvesting," which undermine public confidence in American democracy and in our electoral processes.<sup>1</sup> In combatting journalists, Mr. Grenell has also promoted antisemitic conspiracies about media control in his Twitter exchanges with journalists about the election.<sup>2</sup> Free and fair elections are a hallmark of any democracy. Attacking this institution with baseless allegations seriously threatens the freedoms we all hold dear.
2. In multiple tweets since the start of his appointment, Mr. Grenell has exhibited and encouraged sinophobia (anti-Chinese racism). On July 14th, for example, Mr. Grenell referred to the Coronavirus as the "Chinese flu." Again on September 16, October 16, October 22, October 23, and October 28, Mr. Grenell tweeted about the need to "blame China" for the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup> This inflammatory rhetoric implicitly blames an entire ethnicity for the pandemic, and Mr. Grenell's messaging has coincided with and likely contributed to an ongoing surge in

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<sup>1</sup><https://twitter.com/JordanSekulow/status/1326299999202910213>;

<https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1325452289587335168>;

<https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1324418561327030272>;

<https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1325095687365668865>;

<sup>2</sup><https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1326640226157142017?s=20>

<sup>3</sup> 07/14: <https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1282911573053448194>

- 09/16: <https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1306218417263763457>

- 10/16: <https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1317196309498036225>

- 10/22: <https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1319399686516707331>

- 10/23: <https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1319615523785744384>

- 10/28: <https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1321439644978946048>

hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans.<sup>4</sup> In their report on Mr. Grenell's use of social media, the committee found similar offensive communications to be a 'minor infraction.' Is the University also treating Mr. Grenell's recent tweets as infractions?

3. In multiple tweets and posts on Instagram, Mr. Grenell has shared images of himself at large, indoor events around the country, maskless.<sup>5</sup> While we are aware that Mr. Grenell is not present physically on campus, as a Senior Fellow, he should be modeling the standards of conduct put forth in A Tartan's Responsibility that our students, staff, and faculty are required to uphold. After an instructor in the School of Art tested positive for COVID-19, Provost Garrett wrote that "the instructor did not comply with one or more CMU COVID-19 safety protocols prior to testing positive. As a result, campus privileges for the faculty member... have been revoked for the remainder of the academic year." While this instructor was publicly disciplined for not complying with COVID-19 safety protocols, student complaints filed against Mr. Grenell for his anti-mask behavior have not been answered. Considering widespread state and county level ordinances on mask-wearing and gatherings, it is also likely that Mr. Grenell's refusal to wear a mask violated public-health rules in various locations. A Trump Pride event hosted by Mr. Grenell outside of Pittsburgh on November 1 violated the PA state mask mandate.<sup>6</sup> We would like to know whether corrective action has been taken on this matter, and if not, why Mr. Grenell is exempted from the standards that apply to the rest of the CMU community.
4. On November 2, Mr. Grenell tweeted a photo of President-Elect Joe Biden on an airplane without a mask, claiming that the tweet was proof of Mr. Biden's hypocrisy. It has since been proven that this photo was taken from a Vogue magazine article published well before the onset of the pandemic. After his deliberate falsification was pointed out by other Twitter users, Mr. Grenell refused to acknowledge the inaccuracy of his original post and instead continued to tweet photographs of a mask-free Mr. Biden. These posts willfully obscure the fact that the President-Elect was speaking at outdoor events and practicing social distancing. With nearly 700,000 followers on Twitter alone, Mr. Grenell appears to be engaged in a campaign of politically motivated fabrication. Surely the University does not condone high-profile employees engaging in the willful dissemination of lies. We wonder, then, what corrective action will be taken in response to this behavior by Mr. Grenell?

Academic freedom and intellectual diversity, the reasons CMU cited for the hiring of Mr. Grenell, are being undermined on our campus to protect Mr. Grenell. Neither protects hate speech, disinformation, or the behavior that Mr. Grenell exhibits on a regular basis. The 'intellectual diversity' that Mr. Grenell brings to our campus undermines public trust in critical national institutions, supports hate speech, and promotes selfish and ignorant behavior over common-sense public health guidelines. In a news article published on November 10, a CMU spokesperson claimed that the University would not act, and that Mr.

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<sup>4</sup>Gover, A., Harper, S., & Langton, L. (2020, July 7). Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality. Retrieved November 09, 2020, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7364747/>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.instagram.com/p/CG6dDgiASJV/>; [https://www.instagram.com/p/CG3kjiyA\\_0i/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CG3kjiyA_0i/); <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGoUTXHA7aa/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGkoF26A5yh/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGbUO8aAUCC/>; <https://www.instagram.com/p/CGTiPRdAdRU/>;

<sup>6</sup><https://twitter.com/RichardGrenell/status/1323089604183003138?s=20>  
<https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/gov-wolf-sec-of-health-signs-expanded-mask-wearing-order/>

Grenell was “free to engage in political activity on his own time.”<sup>7</sup> The assumption that Mr. Grenell’s social media account, as a public figure who was hired to bring his political expertise to our University, is separate from his work as a Senior Fellow ignores the basic ethical obligation that members of our community speak truthfully in their areas of expertise. The University claims that Mr. Grenell is entitled to free speech, yet the events hosted by Mr. Grenell in the IPS department are “off the record” and students are prohibited from writing about them in articles or on social media. Why is our use of social media restricted, while Mr. Grenell is permitted to tweet falsehoods and racist comments? Mr. Grenell’s free speech is being promoted at the expense of our own.

In his time as a Senior Fellow, Mr. Grenell has clearly demonstrated his incapacity to promote and uphold the values our University celebrates. To follow up on the commitment made to us in your earlier emails, we ask you, President Jahanian, Dean Casalegno, and Provost Garrett, to please clarify: Do you consider these actions and statements to be in concert with our University values and ethics? If these actions are not in concert with our University values and ethics, what corrective action is being taken to address them? Will the University publicly denounce Mr. Grenell’s racist statements, dissemination of conspiracies, and disdain for public health guidelines?

Mr. Grenell has damaged, and continues to damage, our reputation, our code of ethics, our community, and critical democratic institutions. We, the students of Carnegie Mellon University, condemn Mr. Grenell’s actions. His continued presence in our community is unacceptable.

**Respectfully,**

The undersigned members of the Carnegie Mellon community

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<sup>7</sup><https://www.pgcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/cmu-says-its-ok-for-staff-to-engage-in-political-activity-after-fellow-richard-grenell-alleges-widespread-voter-fraud-without-evidence/Content?oid=18346996>

## **Student Organizations**

Roosevelt Institute at Carnegie Mellon

Women in Politics

Juntos

Spanish and Latin Student Association (SALSA)

CMU Tau Beta Pi (Engineering Honors Society)

MSE Student Advisory Council/ Materials Advantage

CMU Call To Action (CTA)

Women in MechE

Feminists Engaged in Multicultural Matters and Education (FEMME)

CMU Against ICE

Sustainable Earth

Muslim Student Association (MSA)

International City/County Managers Association CMU Student Chapter

Women of Heinz

Heinz Council for Diversity, Richness and Inclusion (CDRI)

CMQ+

Dystopic Tech Watch

Carnegie Involvement Association Buggy (CIA)

oSTEM@CMU

CMU Listens

Biomedical Engineering Society, Carnegie Mellon Chapter ("CMU BMES")

Black Graduate Student Organization (BGSO)

CMU Men's Club Lacrosse

Design for America CMU Chapter

Tepper Net Impact Club

PRISM

National Organization of Minority Architect Students (NOMAS)

WRCT

Undergraduate Entrepreneurship Association

CMU Treblemakers

Independent Musicians Organization

TINA (Trans, Intersex, Nonbinary Alliance)

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