

Millersville students weren't notified when a swastika and threatening language were spray-painted on campus. Now they're speaking out



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Students walk on the Millersville University campus Wednesday, March 11, 2020
BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

Millersville University is under fire from students and alumni for keeping students in the dark about a vandalism incident in which a swastika and other offensive imagery and language were spray-painted on campus buildings earlier this year.

In [a video](#) posted to social media, which has about 8,500 views on Facebook as of 2 p.m. Thursday, recent graduate Noah Gerrity, 23, says Millersville's inaction represents a troubling trend of lacking transparency with students.

The video's spread followed an online controversy involving a prospective Millersville student who shared a racist comment on social media two years ago, along with international unrest sparked by George Floyd's death.

"How would you feel if your home was horrifically vandalized with these things, and you never even knew it happened because nobody told you?" Gerrity, wearing a "Marauder for life" T-shirt, says in the video. "I think that's something you deserve to know."

Millersville, meanwhile, says the video, as well as a [related video](#) posted by senior James Duncan, was inaccurate.

"While James Duncan and Noah Gerrity created technically sound productions, neither present the facts," Millersville's social media accounts posted [in response](#) to the videos.

Millersville's post described why officials felt a notification under the federal Clery Act - which requires colleges and universities to notify students and employees whenever there is a threat or serious crime happening on campus - was unnecessary.

"With campus buildings closed due to COVID-19, and since the graffiti was directed at an employee and an arrest was made immediately, a Timely Warning was not required by the Clery Act," the post stated.

Threatening graffiti

According to a criminal complaint filed by Millersville Borough police, officers responded to a vandalism complaint on March 27 and, upon arriving to the university, noticed someone had spray-

painted offensive, threatening imagery and language, including a swastika and the words "DIE RAT DIE WERE COMIN," on the Student Memorial Center and two residence halls.

Robert Dale Williams, then 37, of Millersville, was arrested on April 1 and charged with retaliation against a victim or witness, terroristic threats, institutional vandalism and theft by unlawful taking.

While the campus had been closed as students shifted to online learning due to COVID-19, about 100 students still lived on campus at the time, university spokeswoman Janet Kacskos in an email.

'We will do better'

Both Gerrity and Duncan in their videos, as well as follow-up interviews with a reporter, expressed frustration over Millersville's apparent lack of transparency with students.

They specifically mentioned two other incidents, which didn't go public until LNP | LancasterOnline published articles: when in October 2019 the university [settled a racial discrimination lawsuit](#) lodged by a former administrator for \$170,000, and when Millersville [hired an adjunct professor](#) for the fall 2019 semester despite the instructor's past involving sexual misconduct.

Duncan told a reporter Millersville has been "extremely hypocritical" by not "following the values that they set themselves." Duncan was referring to the university's EPPIC values: exploration, professionalism, public mission, inclusion, integrity and compassion.

Kacskos said the university has commented on "hateful events" in the past, such as the racist social media comment posted by the prospective student two years ago but widely shared recently. The student, notably, is no longer attending Millersville.

But there is room for improvement, Kacskos said.

"While we were not required to issue a timely warning in this case, we realize there is always more that we can do to enhance communication," she said. "Going forward, we will do better at communicating about events that happen on and around our campus."