B.R.2021-4
CALLING UPON THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH TO SUPPORT APPLICANTS WITH CRIMINAL HISTORIES IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS PROCESS

STUDENT GOVERNMENT BOARD
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

AUTHORED BY: Board Member Annalise Abraham

CO-SPONSORED BY: Executive Vice President Cedric Humphrey, Vice President and Chief of Finance Ben King, Vice President and Chief of Cabinet Tyler Viljaste, Board Member Kathryn Fleisher, Board Member Victoria Chuah, and Board Member Victor So

30 MARCH 2021
Board Member Annalise Abraham introduced the following resolution; which was read for the first time.

A RESOLUTION
SUPPORTING APPLICANTS WITH CRIMINAL HISTORIES IN THE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS PROCESS
WHEREAS, the University of Pittsburgh asks on its undergraduate admissions application¹, “Have you ever been convicted of a felony, or convicted of any crime involving sexual offences or drug distribution, sale, or manufacture?”;

and,

WHEREAS, requiring applicants to reveal their criminal history on college admissions applications discourages those with criminal records from completing the application;² and,

WHEREAS, young Black people and people of color are disproportionately criminalized; therefore, admissions policies that inquire about criminal convictions have a disparate impact on their access to higher education; and,

WHEREAS, asking criminal record questions during the admissions process reduces higher education access to the 30% of Americans who have a criminal record;³ and,

WHEREAS, the Ban the Box campaign⁴ was started by All of Us or None, a national civil rights movement run by formerly incarcerated people and their families. The organization urges employers to “ban the box” by removing questions about criminal history from job applications and instead assess candidates solely based on their qualifications. The scope of this movement

⁴ http://bantheboxcampaign.org/about/#.YFdUAbRKjLY
has broadened to include other aspects of life within which conviction history
plays a role, such as college admissions; and,

WHEREAS, at the University of Pittsburgh’s 2020 Diversity Forum, Dr. Angela
Davis spoke about the need for Ban the Box reforms and the role that
universities must play in making higher education more accessible and
equitable; and,

WHEREAS, “most criminalized harms are rooted in social and economic
inequities,” causing marginalized communities who face such inequities to
have more interactions with the criminal justice system; and,

WHEREAS, gaining a college education is highly beneficial to people with criminal
records, since it makes them more competitive candidates to employers who
might be reluctant to hire them otherwise; and,

WHEREAS, college education has been shown to dramatically reduce recidivism
rates; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Pittsburgh has removed initial questions about
criminal history from staff employment applications; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Pittsburgh has an obligation to ensure the safety of
its students and campus community; and,

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5 Mariame Kaba, We Do This ‘Til We Free Us (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021), 24.

6 http://www.communityalternatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/use-of-criminal-history-
records-reconsidered.pdf

7 https://www.hr.pitt.edu/projects/improvements-applicant-background-check-process
WHEREAS, “there is no statistically significant difference in the rate of campus crime between institutions of higher education that explore undergraduate applicants’ disciplinary background and those that do not”, therefore, campus safety need not be a concern in deciding to ban the box from the University’s admissions applications; and,

WHEREAS, half of all American public universities ask about criminal history in some regard on their admissions applications; and,

WHEREAS, the Common App removed criminal history questions from its general application in 2019; and,

WHEREAS, Maryland, Louisiana, Washington, Colorado and California have laws that restrict public universities from asking criminal history questions during admissions processes; and,

WHEREAS, the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE), which oversees 14 state-owned colleges and universities and is Pennsylvania’s largest higher education provider, has recently removed criminal history questions from its undergraduate admissions applications; and,

WHEREAS, PA State Representative Morgan B. Cephas has introduced legislation that would ban Pennsylvania public colleges and universities

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8 https://www.commonapp.org/blog/change-criminal-history-question-2019-2020-application-year


10 https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/Legis/CSM/showMemoPublic.cfm?chamber=H&SPick=20190&cosponId=32508
from asking about an applicant’s criminal record, except for certain offenses.\textsuperscript{11} This bill would affect all 14 state-owned universities and also state-related universities, including the University of Pittsburgh; now, therefore, be it RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University of Pittsburgh to remove all questions about an applicant’s criminal background from the initial undergraduate admissions application; and be it further RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University of Pittsburgh to work to ensure the safety of the campus community without asking about criminal history on the initial admissions application; and be it further RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University to provide flexibility, services, and supports to students with criminal records, to ensure their success at the University (for example, in the forms of counseling, tutoring, and financial aid); and be it further RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University to assist students when their intended field bars people with criminal histories. The University must support students in overcoming and navigating those restrictions, rather than discouraging them from entering the field of their intended profession; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Student Government Board calls upon the University to advocate to licensing boards and professional certification entities that students with criminal backgrounds should not be categorically barred from certain professions or employment fields; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be effective immediately upon adoption and shall reflect the changes shown in the attached opinion of the Student Government Board.

Eric Macadangdang, President
University of Pittsburgh Student Government Board