Princeton United Left

Authored Collectively by the General Membership of PUL
Mission Statement

Princeton United Left seeks to foster a space on Princeton’s campus for convergence, discussion, and action among individuals and organizations who want to fight for equality and social justice and oppose war, patriarchy, ecological destruction, imperialism, neoliberalism, and all forms of discrimination and oppression.

Princeton United Left sees itself in the tradition of a democratic critique of capitalism. PUL is fundamentally committed to promoting and participating in debates toward systemic alterations and alternatives to capitalism in the 21st century, with the conviction that participatory democracy can serve as a starting framework for the transformation of our political, cultural, and economic life.

As a campus organization, Princeton United Left seeks to nurture a space for theory-oriented discussion of past and present challenges confronting the left, while offering a framework within which individuals from a wide range of activist backgrounds can work together on direct-action campaigns and initiatives.

We invite dissident voices -- from reform-minded progressives to radical activists -- to join us, united by the conviction that a better world is possible.

Current Political Situation on Campus

We begin from the premise that a left-wing coalition of students is possible. Campus culture suggests that these people do not exist; we disagree.

The activist scene on campus today is characterized by a high degree of organizational fragmentation. Issue-specific groups tend to operate in their respective spheres with no institutionalized outlet for synergies. The geographical distance of the campus from urban activist centers, as well as the lack of a multi-party campus political union in which a united left faction might have served a representative purpose, means that progressive student groups have not had structural inducements to form a unified bloc. In contrast to the highly organized campus right, which is helped by well-established (and well-funded) organizational structures like The Princeton Tory, the campus left has long been unable to speak in the common voice of a student publication or even through a sustained dialogue between its constituent groups.

Princeton United Left seeks to address this organizational deficit on the left by
presenting a framework in which progressive activist groups can come together to take
on broad-left projects. Through a system of general assemblies, affinity groups, and
working groups, PUL aims to provide the organizational space through which activists
can collaborate on campaigns and initiatives of common concern.

Mode of Operation

The Princeton United Left embraces a democratic, non-hierarchical approach to
organization. Its self-understanding is that of a collective platform to bring together a
wide range of campus groups working to realize a more just and egalitarian future.

Internal Structure

Within the Princeton United Left, there are affinity groups, working groups, and the
General Assembly. Affinity groups are clusters of existing organizations united in
shared concern for a particular issue that coordinate activism and discussion. There is a
set of core affinity groups that broadly correspond to the most salient issue areas - the
Peace Affinity Group, the Labor Affinity Group, the Race Affinity Group, the Queer and
Gender Affinity Group, the Ecology Affinity Group, and the Human Rights Affinity
Group. We anticipate that as new organizations choose to affiliate with PUL, affinity
groups will merge, grow, and even shift their focus. Currently, the campus left is
fractured -- PUL's affinity groups will change that.

Working groups are comprised of individuals who want to cooperate on long-term
intellectual and activist projects. While affinity groups are more action-oriented, working
groups are oriented towards discussion and study of specific topics. A working group can
be a reading group dedicated to radical political thought, a discussion group about
socioeconomic class and gender on campus, a workshop for political street theatre, a
group working on a publication, a group that looks for potential faculty contributors, and
so on. Working groups will enrich the campus political environment by bringing to the
fore topics that are rarely given the time and attention they require. There are no limits
to what a working group can be - everything is up to the people who choose to constitute
the working group.

The General Assembly, or GA, is the space in which affinity groups and working
groups converge. During a GA, affinity groups and working groups report back on their
work. This is also the place where an idea for an action moves from merely a topic
discussed in an affinity group to a direct action carried out by PUL members. Once GA
participants reach a broad consensus, the action is good to go! Working groups also
present their findings, thoughts, and ideas during the GA for discussion and critique. Membership of either an affinity group or a working group is not fixed. We encourage people to join any groups that interest them.

A Few Practical Points

As we are committed to horizontalism and inclusiveness, there are some guidelines to make the GA a comfortable and safe space. Whether this is your first meeting or your fiftieth, we want you to have an equal opportunity to voice your ideas. Like in any group, there will be people who speak louder than others, people who talk in certain ways, people who are shy, and people who are of various genders and from different backgrounds. We want to be mindful of this and work to ensure an equal hearing for every voice. All questions are equally important and all concerns are equally valid. We are not in the business of teaching dogmas; we are all each other’s students.

Organizing without hierarchy, especially on a campus as rigidly stratified as Princeton’s, can be confusing and even contentious. We respect the full autonomy and independence of all groups that choose to affiliate with PUL. We encourage affiliated groups to promote the affinity group to which they belong (e.g. if your organization deals with Israel/Palestine, publicize the PUL Human Rights Affinity Group). Making affiliation public is key to PUL’s mission.

Princeton United Left is recognized as a student organization by the University and receives funding from a number of academic departments. We determine democratically, through GA deliberations, how to allocate funds to affinity and working groups, and how to cover any operating costs.

Planned Financing

Princeton University is a fantastically well-funded university, having one of the largest endowment funds among postsecondary schools in the United States. For that reason, PUL has a number of spruces through which it can procure funding for the projects and activities it pursues on campus, including but not limited to:

- The Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students
- Projects Board (run the by the Undergraduate Student Government)
- Academic programs with potential for faculty allies, such as the:
  - Center for African American Studies
  - Department of Anthropology
  - Department of Comparative Literature
- Department of German
- Department of Religion

- Other University institutions, including but not limited to the:
  - Council for the Humanities
  - Pace Center for Civic Engagement