Select Penn State Presidential Commission on Racism, Bias, and Community Safety—Recommendations

October 1, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Structural problems, such as institutional racism and bias, require structural solutions. At Penn State—a microcosm of the United States—we must recognize that racism and bias are pervasive in our teaching, learning, service, and leadership environments. The University has addressed other crises through a commitment to cultural shifts and ameliorative processes. Rooting out racism and bias embedded and reproduced in our systems deserves the same commitment to action.

By failing to address institutional racism and bias, Penn State will perpetuate and exacerbate the harm done to marginalized segments of the community. Moreover, the absence of solid diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) structures and processes will eventually diminish the University’s potential. The University’s current approaches to DEI do not engage fully or honestly with the aspirations and commitments expressed in One Penn State 2025, thwarts the possibilities of the University’s strategic plan, and further enables the racism and bias that disproportionately impact the most vulnerable among us.

This Commission proposes an overarching strategy using an Enterprise Approach, which assumes a complex organizational environment comprised of people with different abilities, backgrounds, and experiences. This Enterprise Approach embraces these differences and seeks to transform campus culture by changing institutional policies, practices, expectations, and outcomes. The goal of this Enterprise Approach is to align crucial aspects of the University’s strategic priorities – advancing inclusion, equity, and diversity – with the University’s overall organization. This approach structures this Commission’s four recommendations.

University stakeholders must reframe DEI in coordinated, collaborative, and interdisciplinary ways designed to solve intractable problems, rather than framing diversity, equity, and inclusion themselves as challenges to be solved. Similarly, an Enterprise Approach replaces linear, top-down approaches to information flow with a cogent DEI network that promotes lateral knowledge-sharing and learning, fosters better coordination, collaboration, and integration of best practices among the 24 campuses. In addition, the Enterprise Approach locates an individual at the highest leadership level with a portfolio rooted in accountability. DEI professionals at the campuses would be partners in ongoing conversations, developers of shared best practices, contributors to innovative solutions, and guarantors of effectiveness. Racism and bias are complex. As such, a comprehensive approach that centers individuals, tears down silos, and advances good governance, transparency, and collective responsibility is needed.
Penn State must create and sustain a culture of belonging in which the multiple identities of its stakeholders (students, staff, faculty, administrators, alumni, donors) are valued and respected — free from intimidation, subordination, discrimination, and harassment. Penn State must move beyond notions of “multiculturalism” to a praxis that empowers marginalized voices at all levels of leadership and seeks social justice in all its forms. Finally, University leaders, administrators, faculty, and staff should reflect the diversity of the nation and be held accountable for providing a curriculum that centers DEI in both method and practice.

Our four recommendations are prioritized in order of importance.

1. Develop, promote, and support TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION
2. Develop, promote, and support RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND LEARNING THAT ADVANCE ANTIRACIST SCHOLARSHIP, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURE
3. Develop, promote, and support UNIVERSITY-WIDE ONBOARDING, MENTORSHIP, AUDITING, AND CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS, STAFF, FACULTY, AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP IN EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES
4. Develop, promote, and support ACCOUNTABILITY IN IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING AN EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE CAMPUS CULTURE

While this Commission is not responsible for operationalizing this work, the members have committed themselves to assisting University leadership with identifying the following: who owns this important, expansive portfolio; who makes the decisions; who is responsible for implementing policies and procedures; and how the work will be assessed, and by whom. That is, Commission members will remain engaged in guiding the implementation of the vision set forth in the Commission’s recommendations.

With the approval of the Office of the President, the Commission may seek to define the scope and breadth of a more long-term role in implementing the proposed Enterprise Approach and four recommendations. For now, the Commission sets forth actionable, measurable steps to optimize current resources, and recommends novel approaches to achieve meaningful gains in social justice, particularly for historically underrepresented and marginalized communities.
ENTERPRISE APPROACH

- As a methodological linchpin to our recommendations, we propose the Enterprise Approach to implement a networked DEI strategy. This approach is comprehensive, integrated, and synchronized, and it has the capacity to craft, carry out and monitor policies and practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion across the geographically dispersed Penn State community.
- The Enterprise Approach depends on coherence and effectiveness in interactions and communication among such University-level units as Affirmative Action, Educational Equity, Human Resources, Faculty Senate, Ethics and Compliance, General Counsel, the Office of the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business/Treasurer, and the Office of the Senior Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses, particularly as these interactions involve clear and visible accountability in policies and practices – most especially policies and practices related to biased treatment against students, faculty, and staff across the University.
- Given that the Office of Educational Equity is the University’s lead diversity unit, we recommend that Educational Equity report directly to the Office of the President. This move is central to our methodology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silo Approach</th>
<th>Enterprise Approach</th>
<th>Problem that the Enterprise Approach Solves</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defining the Approach to DEI at Penn State</strong></td>
<td>Comprehensive and integrated University-wide approach to DEI that maximizes networks and resources</td>
<td>Consolidates and coordinates DEI functions, policies, and practices; promotes clearer lines of communication; maximizes effectiveness of disparate, disconnected, and often duplicated resources; standardizes important procedures; and provides more visible accountability for DEI goals.</td>
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<td><strong>Leadership Level</strong></td>
<td>University-wide, networked, and distributed</td>
<td>Creates a unified, coherent, and networked vision of DEI; connects DEI policies, practices and initiatives to the University strategic plan in a more deliberate, intentional manner; generates holistic approaches to implementing successful DEI strategies across units, promoting greater collaboration.</td>
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<td><strong>Organizational Structure</strong></td>
<td>Loose, decentralized approach through which colleges, campuses, and units make local decisions. Creates varied standards and varied DEI competence.</td>
<td>Promoting a robust, standardized and synchronized approach in which DEI is more uniformly and transparently delivered across the University.</td>
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<td><strong>Achieving the Vision of One Penn State 2025 - Strategic Plan to “Embrace Inclusion” and to promote the Institutional Value of Respect</strong></td>
<td>Goals for a college, campus, or unit, as opposed to the University writ large.</td>
<td>Establishing a DEI network provides an ambitious goal that centers the 24 campuses on reimagining a learning community free of racism and bias.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Change Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Currently on a continuous (incremental) Improvement cycle that is, at best, evolutionary.</td>
<td>Transformative (Reengineering DEI)</td>
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RECOMMENDATION ONE: TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS

Rationale: The Commission was brought into being to identify innovative ideas to disrupt patterns of discrimination, uproot institutional racism, and drive transformational change at Penn State. The development of a University-level Penn State Truth and Reconciliation Process would be a bold step. The Process would give Penn State a powerful tool for shifting campus culture to positively change how members of the University community interact with, treat, and regard each other.

To identify a pathway toward healing, restoration, and rehabilitation, the University must first acknowledge where it has been and where it continues to reside. Therefore, the Commission has identified the need to set the University on a new trajectory that can also position Penn State as a leader for other higher education institutions around the nation. A Penn State Truth and Reconciliation Process would allow for the collection of information about historic and current policies and practices linked to racial and ethnic harm, intimidation, and harassment committed against students, faculty, staff, and initial occupants of the land the University inhabits. It would design a framework to acknowledge the truth—past and present—to establish a path forward in service to community healing and an equitably shared future.

While this Process may be difficult and uncomfortable, a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation would be a brave and necessary part of transformative praxis. In this way, Penn State would not only confirm its position as a flagship land grant university committed to serving the interests and needs of the public, but it would also distinguish itself as a vanguard institution of anti-racist work in U.S. higher education.

Operation and Practice: The Truth and Reconciliation Process should be headed by independent, third-party professional mediators to ensure that its processes are authoritative and thorough. The mediators would work with select Penn State officials to operationalize the process. These officials should be selected through Penn State offices already engaged in this work, or having portfolios relevant to this work, including Educational Equity, Affirmative Action, General Counsel, Human Resources, Ethics and Compliance, Faculty Senate, and other designated units.

The Truth and Reconciliation Process will operate to address past and present policies and practices, provide a University-wide framework for rehabilitation, reparations, and restoration for affected communities, and detail recommendations geared toward healing communities within Penn State.

- Section I – Past
  - The University should engage independent historians to study past practices and policies. These historians should have full cooperation with University library services, University Police and Public Safety, and resources available through
Centre County (and other counties) and the surrounding townships to ensure the data sources are robust and varied.

- **Section II – Present**
  - Penn State community members and alumni will be invited to testify and articulate primary experiences of race-based injustice and aggressions, and other forms of bias and discrimination.
  - In line with the Commission’s goal of establishing participatory restorative practices centered on mediation and healing communities rather than punishment, those who testify will be protected from retribution, recrimination, and University-imposed disciplinary measures.
  - While this may present legal or ethical questions, the Truth and Reconciliation Process would involve the Affirmative Action, General Counsel, Human Resources, Ethics and Compliance, Faculty Senate, and other relevant offices and units to devise procedures that preserve the integrity of the Process while balancing individuals’ legal and moral rights.

- **Section III – Rehabilitation, Reparations, and Recommendations**
  - There is very limited precedent of U.S. universities engaging in a process of the kind proposed here. For example, in 2015, Georgetown University created a Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation to “establish a dialogue on Georgetown’s historical ties to the institution of slavery.” In 2019, Georgetown students voted to nominally increase their tuition by $27.20 with proceeds supporting health and education initiatives for the descendants of the 272 enslaved Africans sold to establish the university. Penn State may be able to study these institutions' processes, while also looking to parallels with other Truth and Reconciliation proceedings that have approached similar issues in education to date. It may also look to parallels with other T&R commissions that have approached similar issues in education to date.
    - Georgetown’s processes are further explained here: https://college.georgetown.edu/news-story/professor-robert-patterson-discusses-h-r-40-bill-offers-suggestions-for-reparations/#

**Reports:** One of the final outcomes of the Truth and Reconciliation Process should be to publish a series of reports to be released in volumes according to the specific policies and practices investigated. For example, one volume should be dedicated to unearthing and publicly acknowledging the Native lands that Penn State campuses currently occupy. This would require working with indigenous leaders and activists to identify the nations displaced. This work could inform, for instance, the University’s acknowledgment and annual commemoration of Indigenous People’s Day. All Truth and Reconciliation reports should be archived, updated, and periodically republished.
RECOMMENDATION TWO: RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND LEARNING THAT FURTHERS ANTIRACIST SCHOLARSHIP, PEDAGOGY, AND CULTURE

To begin the work of dismantling racism and discrimination, the University must fund, support, and commit to antiracist scholarship across all campuses. Antiracist scholarship would include teaching, research, creative activities, and public programming. Resources and support may include mentoring programs (e.g., Faculty Pathways), release-time, funds for collaboration (e.g., team teaching, collaborative research, etc.), a new Antiracist Scholarly Center or Consortium, or fellowships to attract and recruit external scholars, researchers, educators, and community leaders, as well as develop local Penn State undergraduate researchers, graduate students, and faculty across the 24 campuses.

To make Penn State a leader in antiracist practice and culture, we charge the following:

Create and fund an Antiracist Scholarly Research Center or Consortium linking the 24 campuses with a unified fellowship program as a primary focus

• An Antiracist Scholarly Research Center or Consortium would support antiracist scholarship (teaching, research, extension, creative activity, programming) across the University, as well as robust mentoring, faculty release-time, and support for collaborative initiatives.
• A Fellowship Program linked to this Center or Consortium would promote and shepherd research fueled by restorative, critical, evidence-based, abolitionist, and humanity-centered antiracist emphases. To be selected, Fellows would be expected to demonstrate research, teaching, and/or extension excellence in race and racism, such as expertise in critical race theory, critical pedagogy, Black/Latinx studies, and related fields.

Make antiracism central to a Penn State education

• Develop and strengthen an equity-centered curriculum, drawing on the research and pedagogical expertise of Penn State faculty, particularly those from departments, centers, institutes, and other units where social difference, inequality, and change are topics of teaching and scholarship.
• Identify resources and funds to help departments and programs embed antiracist pedagogy throughout our core curriculum.
• Craft antiracist learning objectives and outcomes (an antiracist “checklist”) applicable across the curriculum, including a rubric/checklist of options for what “counts” as an anti-racist curriculum and how best to bring all University curricula in alignment with antiracist teaching and learning practices.
• Create an accountability model that sets expectations for each college, campus, and unit to select faculty to participate in and/or lead antiracist curricular revision processes.
• Avoid a strictly additive approach to the curriculum. Instead, changes must “decolonize” and strengthen Penn State’s current curriculum to do the antiracist work that can and must be embedded into every Penn State degree program. A decolonized curriculum privileges critical, restorative, intersectional, and justice-centered approaches to teaching and learning.
• Incentivize the development of integrative courses focused on social justice and antiracism.
• Work closely with the Faculty Senate on Education, Curricular Affairs, and Educational Equity committees throughout antiracist curricular development and approval processes.
• Bring Penn State’s General Education curriculum in alignment with antiracist learning objectives and outcomes, including assessment of US/IL and other cultural requirements.
• Conduct intercultural assessments (through the Intercultural Development Inventory) before and after co-curricular activities to assess the effectiveness and progress of anti-racist curriculum.

Remove bias as a barrier to the success of students, staff, and faculty of color in research, teaching, and extension environments
• Institutionalize removal of bias from teaching and extension evaluation. Continue to institutionalize the elimination of subjective measures and implicit racial biases in the Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness (SRTE) tool, offsetting its deficiencies with other, more innovative methods for evaluating teaching effectiveness.
• Standardized entrance exams (e.g., GRE, ACT, SAT) are poor predictors of student academic success and contain implicit racial bias. Discontinue their use as part of the admissions process, even when voluntarily provided.
• Implement incentivized annual antibias professional development for academic advisors, instructors, and teaching assistants to foster equity and inclusion. Require instructors and teaching assistants to demonstrate competencies in pedagogies that contribute to eliminating biases in the classroom, particularly toward students of color and international students.
• Develop a program to support travel and registration to attend conferences for networking and career-building opportunities for students, staff, and faculty to strengthen community between and among University campuses.
• Acknowledge and address racial biases in the process of seeking competitive funding to support teaching, extension, and research activities. These biases directly affect the development of a dossier and affect promotion, tenure, and annual reviews.
• Faculty, staff, and students of color, and women faculty, staff, and students often have higher service roles compared to others. For example, women are routinely assigned tasks and service roles as a mechanism to meet diversity policy requirements on
committees or to address DEI issues. Make visible, formally acknowledge, and reward these efforts in the tenure, promotion, and annual review processes.

- Reinforce effective mentoring programming to help faculty, staff, and students of color navigate the University research, teaching, and learning environments. Invest in strategies, such as hiring regional DEI professionals at the campuses, to reinforce mentoring and sponsorship programs.

- Create transfer centers that specifically help students of color who are first-generation, challenged by poverty, or hail from Penn State’s community colleges.

**Optimize existing tools and create novel resources to promote a welcoming and safe culture on Penn State’s campuses**

- Deploy a social norming campaign that operationalizes the University’s values using a social justice framework (equity, access, rights, participation).
- Implement mandatory education for incoming students and employees regarding social media practices in consideration of the University’s values.
- Encourage and support student activities for freedom of expression; for example, nonviolent student activist education, special endorsements for athletes (e.g., “taking a knee,” apparel messaging); badging and credentialing for social change (recognized by colleges for distinction); active “free speech zones.”
- Create a high-level “in-house” education center for diversity, equity, and inclusion, which offers consultancy and leadership to University units (e.g., training for administrative, faculty, and staff search committees) and for communities surrounding Penn State campuses.
- Create a single reporting portal for complaints of wrongdoing, staffed by trained professionals (e.g., licensed social workers) to triage calls and connect submitters with appropriate resources.
- Promote better clarity and enhancement of police reporting and investigation protocols involving instances of ethnic intimidation and hate crimes, as well as active University Strategic Communications messaging at the front end of unfolding events (e.g., the Clery Act regarding sexual assault).
RECOMMENDATION THREE: UNIVERSITY-WIDE ONBOARDING AND MENTORSHIP ON BEHALF OF STUDENTS, STAFF, FACULTY, AND ADMINISTRATION

All of Penn State’s structures have produced (and reproduced) the realities of today (i.e., the inputs, environment, and outputs). A comprehensive, organizational development strategy that centers structural effectiveness or organizational excellence with human development for DEI is warranted.

To use a simple model for this brief narrative, we can change the organization when we restructure the inputs, environment, and outputs (I-E-O) to reach specific DEI-focused goals. If we continue with the I-E-O model, specific structures, strategies, and methods would be created to engage all entrance and exit points to the University. This approach could engage inputs, environments, and outputs in this way:

INPUTS (how are community entrants attracted and invited)

- Enrollment management
  - Require all student applicants to demonstrate for admission consideration how they will contribute to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and the public good.
  - Fund financial aid increases to address individual and community vulnerabilities and inequities.
- Talent sourcing
  - Require all employee applicants to demonstrate for employment consideration how they will contribute to advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and the public good.
  - Use inclusive recruiting practices and experts to replace current transactional foci.
- Skill requirement
  - Require all position postings to include the unit’s DEI commitment and describe the skills necessary for the job.
  - Require all positions to include foundational cultural consciousness.
- Budget models
  - Embed DEI metrics for evaluation in all budgets.
  - Require vendor contracts to reflect the diversity of the state and/or nation.

ENVIRONMENTS (what are the cultural components that reflect and affect change)

- Curricular requirements must reflect the University’s values, engage the most insidious social problems, and be inclusive.
  - Reward expertise for creating and delivering high-quality curriculum.
  - Use general education, or a common core, to unite the Penn State learning community through engagement of the land grant mission and public service.
• Listen, publicly discuss, and ameliorate structural barriers to diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments.
• Attend to the enduring and intersectional historic, economic, and social forces (locally, nationally, and globally) that affect diversity, equity, and inclusion at Penn State.
• Hold individual students and employees accountable for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. Initiatives could include, for example:
  o Consciousness rubrics for use in assessing performance and skill
  o Compensation driven by the demonstration of advancing DEI
• Dedicate adequate resources to these efforts. Initiatives include, for example,
  o Mentoring programs (faculty, staff, administrator, and student-focused)
  o Inclusive onboarding programs that set expectations for professional engagement in consideration of the University’s values and advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion
  o High-quality training and education programs to build knowledge, skill, and overall DEI-focused capacity
• Embed University DEI-focused priorities in all activities, discussed publicly and routinely.

OUTPUTS (what is created by the organization)

• Inclusive, welcoming communities
• Active alumni representative of a diversity of graduates
• Skilled leadership for supporting a diverse democracy
• Invigorated civic engagement
• Culture change
• Alleviate disparities
RECOMMENDATION FOUR: ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability in this section includes two distinct and interdependent foci: individual-level performance and organizational culture.

- Individual accountability engages the extent to which employees are held responsible and rewarded for professional competencies (e.g., supervision, project management, DEI competence, communication, quantitative analysis, teamwork, relationship building, budget administration, University procurement, and contracts).
- Accountability as an organizational, cultural characteristic refers to the extent to which structures, rewards, and penalties exist to support and operationalize a University-wide, cohesive approach to Advancing Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity at Penn State.

Individual accountability is activated when every unit leader, administrator, budget executive, manager, department chair, faculty, and staff member assume responsibility, and hold others responsible, for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion. We can make DEI-centered responsibilities explicit in job descriptions, performance appraisals, and tenure and promotion criteria. Ultimately, it is the duty of the executives to reward or critique performance that either engages DEI-centered practice or not. As well, it is the duty of the President, Executive Vice President and Provost, Office of the Senior Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses, and Office of the Senior Vice President for Finance and Business/Treasurer to hold executives accountable. Any DEI-centered practice and strategy is doomed if we pretend that all leadership are interested in or capable of advancing this important work.

Creating a DEI-focused organizational change effort that highlights accountability requires:

- Explicit, centrally defined, measurable goals (short [1-2 years], medium [4-5 years], and long term [10-15 years]) for all units within the University.
- Large scale investment in building faculty and staff professional capacity regarding DEI-focused knowledge and skills.
- Bold leadership to coach, support, and provide feedback to employees.
- Assessment tools that reflect University goals and priorities.
- Myriad opportunities for practicing new skills and receiving feedback regarding efforts.
- Defined rewards and consequences for meeting or not meeting goals (e.g., transparent implications for budget and staffing allocations, general and merit salary increases, and promotion considerations).
- An administrative structure (including leadership, expertise, authority, resources, compensation) appropriate to direct and support such an effort.

There are many tools we would recommend using to gather the necessary information in support of a DEI-focused organizational change effort, but these tools are only useful as a part of a comprehensive, Enterprise Approach that engages fully the seven components listed
above. While they are wholly inadequate as stand-alone efforts to advance inclusion, equity, and diversity, they could include:

- Unit-focused equity audits conducted by expert, external reviewers every five or so years with findings and results made public.
- Routine comprehensive and public studies of salary equity (see the approach used at the University of California) with a data-centric approach to remedying inequities (see McChesney, 2018).
- Enhancements to evaluative criteria that assess promotion, tenure, performance, merit raises, leadership and service appointments, awards, and/or internal grants, to better reflect and align with the strategic priorities outlined in Advancing Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity, and to root out bias and racism in current criteria.
INITIAL OPERATIONALIZING OF COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Empanel Subcommittee 1 to Guide the University in Performing a DEI Inventory (Roderick, Emil, Gary, Elsa, Beth)**
  - Map the network of DEI efforts and their constituents across campuses, colleges, and units.
  - Identify the level, type, and scope of DEI positions, advisory groups, and work; and catalogue programs, initiatives, and strategies deployed across campuses, colleges, and units.

- **Empanel Subcommittee 2 to Guide the University in Establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Process (Efrain, Chris T, Alice, Danielle)**
  - Identify scholars/professionals at Penn State who have familiarity with Truth and Reconciliation processes and social justice orientation (drawing participation from First Peoples, people of color, and experts in the field of Critical Race Theory, among many other fields and contributors.
  - Evaluate models of various Truth and Reconciliation processes and assess how this might look at a university as opposed to or in comparison with Truth and Reconciliation processes conducted within national contexts.
  - Identify obstacles, barriers, risks, liabilities, and institutional challenges that need to be addressed and/or negotiated with General Counsel, Affirmative Action, and Human Resources in the creation of a University-located Truth and Reconciliation Process.

- **Empanel Subcommittee 3 to Guide the University in Exploring the Establishment of an Antiracist Scholarly Research Center/Consortium (Kenya, Kimberly, Ashley, Diego, Justin, and Clarence)**
  - Evaluate models for Antiracist Scholarly Research Centers/Consortia that assess resources at Penn State, or create a new model.
  - Benchmark and research existing centers and/or consortia focused on antiracist and DEI work to compile and assess insights that could be applied to Penn State.
  - Use the DEI inventory mapping work developed by Subcommittee 1 to determine where current antiracist scholarly research is already occurring and determine any existing gaps.
  - Use the DEI Inventory to identify existing DEI work and any possible gaps in programming, curriculum, teaching, and instruction.
  - Promote the core principle that an Antiracist Scholarly Research Center/Consortium comprises and serves all stakeholders within the University, which includes, but is not limited to, undergraduate and graduate students, staff, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and administrators.
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