

U.S.

The New York Times

Harvard Rescinds Admission for Parkland Student Over Offensive Comments

By Patricia Mazzei

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MIAMI — A recent graduate of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., who became a gun rights activist in the wake of the deadly shooting that killed 17 people last year, said on Monday that Harvard College rescinded its admission offer over racist and offensive remarks he made as a 16-year-old student.

The graduate, Kyle Kashuv, 18, announced Harvard's decision on Twitter, posting letters he received from the college — first asking him to explain the comments, and then informing him that it would no longer accept him, citing its serious consideration of “the qualities of maturity and moral character.”

“After careful consideration the committee voted to rescind your admission to Harvard College,” William R. Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid, wrote Mr. Kashuv in a letter dated June 3. “We are sorry about the circumstances that have led us to withdraw your admission, and we wish you success in your future academic endeavors and beyond.”



Kyle Kashuv @KyleKashuv · 10h

Replying to @KyleKashuv

6/ I also sent an email to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to seek guidance on how to right this wrong and work with them once I was on campus.



me May 27
to diversity

To Harvard College Office of Diversity Education and Support,

Around two years ago, when I was 16 years old, before the mass shooting that occurred at my high school, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, I was part of a group in which we used abhorrent racial slurs. We did so out of a misplaced sense of humor: we treated the words themselves as though they bore little weight, and used them only for their shock value. Looking back two years later, I cannot recognize that person. I make absolutely no excuse for those comments. I said them, and I regret them deeply. I bore no

become in the future.

I am deeply sorry for my past comments, I know I am not the same person. But I realize there is always more I can do to understand and learn about the struggle and pain of minority communities in America and worldwide. During my gap year, I will supplement my activism to include reaching out to minority communities. I am open to any advice or suggestions on activities I might pursue during my gap year in pursuit of that goal. I am committed to engaging on this issue, and I plan to visit your office when I arrive at Harvard in the fall of 2020 after I complete my gap year.

Sincerely,



Kyle Kashuv
@KyleKashuv

7/ Harvard decided to rescind my admission with the following letter. pic.twitter.com/P3bLkF3hHn

3,989 7:00 AM - Jun 17, 2019

1,006 people are talking about this

In a telephone interview on Monday, Mr. Kashuv, who moved to Washington after graduation to lobby for school safety legislation, described the past few weeks dealing with the fallout of his comments as “rough” and a “whirlwind.”

“Hopefully people have the goodness in their hearts to forgive me,” he said. “I really hope that. What I said two years ago isn’t indicative of who I am.”

Unlike some of his classmates who became national figures for starting a youth movement against gun violence, Mr. Kashuv garnered widespread attention as a conservative student in favor of gun rights. He served as the high school outreach director for Turning Point USA, a conservative group with ties to the Trump family. Mr. Kashuv has since stepped down from that position, though he said on Monday his departure was unrelated to the comments that got him into trouble with Harvard.

He first apologized last month for the comments, which he said he made in a Google Doc and in text messages a couple of years ago. A video showing screenshots of what he wrote, including repeated racial slurs, was posted online last month, apparently by at least one former classmate. Mr. Kashuv said “former peers and political opponents” then questioned Harvard directly about admitting him.

“We were 16-year-olds making idiotic comments, using callous and inflammatory language in an effort to be as extreme and shocking as possible,” Mr. Kashuv wrote on Twitter on May 22. “I’m embarrassed by it, but I want to be clear that the comments I made are not indicative of who I am or who I have become in the years since.”

Two days later, Mr. Kashuv received Harvard's letter asking him to explain himself. Mr. Kashuv, who graduated earlier this month, had planned to take a gap year before matriculating at Harvard in the fall of 2020. Two other Parkland student activists, Jaclyn Corin and David Hogg, both of them vocal proponents of tighter gun restrictions, are headed to Harvard this fall.

Mr. Kashuv told Harvard he apologized "unequivocally." He said he could not recall what he had written beyond what his former classmate had made public and had no record of the conversations himself.

Screenshots show Mr. Kashuv and other students used a Google Doc study guide as a chat of sorts, with several of them editing the document simultaneously and commenting on each other's remarks. Mr. Kashuv went back and tried to delete his comments later, according to the student who posted the video with the screenshots on Twitter, but they proved to be recoverable. The student who posted the video did not respond to requests for comment on Monday.

One screenshot shows Mr. Kashuv using a racial slur for African-Americans more than a dozen times.

"like im really good at typing" the slur, he wrote. "ok like practice uhhhhh makes perfect son??!!"

In a different screenshot of a text message, Mr. Kashuv allegedly also used the slur to refer to black student athletes.

The Google Doc comments were made late at night as the students tried to outdo each other with outrageous remarks, Mr. Kashuv said in the interview on Monday, describing himself as thoughtless and immature at the time.

"In the same document, I said a bunch of anti-Semitic stuff," he acknowledged. "That's not who I am. My parents are Jewish. I'm Jewish. I go to synagogue every single week now — I've been going the past few weeks."

A Harvard spokeswoman said the college does not “comment publicly on the admissions status of individual applicants.” Harvard informs students upon their admission that the college reserves the right to withdraw its offer for several reasons, including if an admitted student “engages or has engaged in behavior that brings into question their honesty, maturity or moral character.”

In 2017, Harvard rescinded admission offers for at least 10 applicants who had shared sexually explicit and other offensive memes and messages in a private Facebook group.

Parkland, however, brings different political challenges.

Conservative Stoneman Douglas students have said they felt marginalized by their peers and the news media after the Feb. 14, 2018, shooting, which inspired young people across the country to try to register voters and get gun laws changed. Already, some political commentators on the right see Harvard’s decision to rescind his admission as motivated by complaints from Parkland graduates who oppose Mr. Kashuv’s politics.

Harvard has faced other recent criticism for its handling of politically fraught matters. Last month, the university did not renew the appointments of the first two African-American undergraduate faculty deans in the school’s history — both of them law professors — after protests from students who were unhappy that one of the deans took on the disgraced movie producer Harvey Weinstein as a legal client.

Mr. Kashuv did not accuse Harvard of making a politically motivated decision, though he noted that others have raised that point. He did say he had not spent time with the students on the Google Doc chat since the shooting, in part because of their political disagreements over gun control.

“We’ve just drifted apart,” he said. “They disagree with me politically, and they don’t like my political views.”

He said he has other friends who disagree with him, and that several of them reached out on Monday to offer their support and tell him they thought Harvard had gone too far.

Other Stoneman Douglas graduates, however, appeared to at least indirectly refer to Mr. Kashuv on social media, making vague comments about “consequences” and sending him “thoughts and prayers,” a gesture victims of gun violence have seen as an empty one, especially coming from opponents of gun control.

Susan C. Beachy contributed research.

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