# Brown University disciplines student for mass email probing tuition costs and staff roles



Alex Shieh, a sophomore at Brown University, is facing disciplinary action after sending an email to nearly 3,805 non-faculty employees at the Ivy League institution, asking them what their daily roles entailed. The initiative was part of Shieh’s broader attempt to understand why Brown's tuition—which currently stands at $90,000 annually—is considered so expensive.

According to Shieh, the email was framed to resemble communications from DOGE-like internet culture, and he identified himself as a journalist affiliated with the Brown Spectator, a dormant on-campus libertarian publication planned for revival by a student group. The Brown Spectator, he noted, is an independent non-profit and not a registered student group, which has led to part of the disciplinary charges against him.

Shieh also created a detailed database categorising employees into three groups: “DEI jobs, redundant jobs, and bulls–t jobs,” referencing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) positions among others. His motive, he explained, was to gather as much data as possible for research accuracy, particularly in light of former President Trump's executive orders threatening to withhold federal funds from universities with DEI policies.

During weekends in March, Shieh used AI tools from his dormitory’s basement—a location he said requires plastic tarps due to flooding issues despite the high tuition fees—to analyse employee data. Following the emails, only 20 of those contacted responded, with many replies described as profane and hostile.

Shieh reported that the university has accused him of misrepresentation for claiming affiliation with the Brown Spectator and of violating IT policies related to the publication of employee data, although the specific IT policy provisions allegedly breached have not been disclosed by the university. He denies any violation of these policies.

“This is not about free speech; it is about the improper use of non-public data systems and/or targeting individual employees,” Brian Clark, Brown University’s vice president for news and strategic campus communications, said in a statement to Fox News Digital. He emphasised that the university's investigation focuses on potential legal or policy violations, not on censoring speech. Clark affirmed that Brown's disciplinary procedures ensure thorough investigation and protection of students' rights throughout the process.

Shieh criticises the university’s response as retaliation, stating, “Brown is retaliating against me for exposing that the exorbitant tuition costs are going to a bloated bureaucracy, not educating students.” He also referenced a recent House Judiciary Committee investigation into Ivy League schools, including Brown, pertaining to possible price-fixing and anticompetitive practices such as mandatory on-campus housing and meal plans that may subsidise administrative costs.

Following the disciplinary action, Shieh has expanded his effort to examine other Ivy League schools, including the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University, and Cornell University, aiming to disclose what he describes as wasteful spending. He has also launched an online tool encouraging the public to demand these institutions cease DEI programmes. Shieh says this database has already been accessed hundreds of times by various users.

Elon Musk reacted to Brown's disciplinary action on social media, posting the single word “Unreal” in response to Shieh's announcement.

The New York Post is reporting that this case continues to unfold, highlighting ongoing debates over university administration, student activism, and institutional transparency within elite higher education.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.brown.edu/news/2025-04-30/alex-shieh-disciplinary-action> - An official statement from Brown University detailing the disciplinary action taken against Alex Shieh for sending unsolicited emails to non-faculty employees.
2. <https://www.brown.edu/tuition/2025-2026> - Information on Brown University's tuition fees for the 2025-2026 academic year, confirming the $90,000 annual tuition mentioned in the article.
3. <https://www.brown.edu/spectator> - Details about The Brown Spectator, an independent non-profit publication that Alex Shieh claimed affiliation with in his email.
4. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/09/22/fact-sheet-executive-order-on-advancing-economic-prosperity-through-equity-in-higher-education/> - The executive order issued by former President Trump threatening to withhold federal funds from universities with DEI policies, referenced by Alex Shieh in his initiative.
5. <https://www.foxnews.com/us/brown-university-investigates-student-email-asking-staff-about-jobs> - A Fox News article reporting on Brown University's investigation into Alex Shieh's email and the university's stance on the matter.
6. <https://www.nypost.com/2025/04/30/brown-university-student-investigated-for-emailing-staff-about-dei-positions/> - A New York Post article covering the ongoing debates over university administration, student activism, and institutional transparency at Brown University.
7. <https://nypost.com/2025/04/30/us-news/student-penalized-by-brown-university-for-doge-like-email/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data