

Director apologizes for offensive letter

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Associate Editor

The associate director of the Office of International Education is making an effort "to mend fences" after writing what several students see as a racist remark.

Peter Briggs found himself in hot water with some members of the area's Asian community after writing a short letter that refers to the Chinese as people "who will run all over you if you let them."

Some Asian students, including Hlayang Yuan, president of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, and ASUO President Bobby Lee, have reacted with outrage and initially called for Briggs' to be fired.

But others have jumped to Briggs' defense, including Wenyan Do, president of the Chinese Students Association.

Briggs apologized for his written comments and wrote an open letter of apology to all registered Chinese students. He said he understands the concerns of those who voiced their anger at a private meeting with University President Myles Brand, who declined to take any action but suggested those involved seek mediation.

Briggs said his intent now is to meet with those students himself and focus on rebuilding broken ties.

"A lot of people who know me have been very supportive," Briggs said. "My own feeling now is to look at how we can mend broken fences. I made a mistake, but can we recognize that and move forward? I think calling for my resignation is a bit extreme."

Briggs added that a major concern now is that the campus Chinese community not become divided because of an issue surrounding him.

"I'm using this as a real wake up call," he said. "Let's not argue, but move forward. I feel this can be worked out. There will still be some who are not happy, but I want to be able to work together again and mend fences and I'll work hard to do

that."

The letter in question, dated Aug. 5, was written in response to a student's request for an extension on his student housing lease. Students who finish school are given two months to find another place of residence. Wu Xiangui, who lives in Westmoreland housing, graduated in June. He requested the extension so he could stay in the low-rent homes until he found work and could afford other accommodations.

Darrell Neet, Westmoreland maintenance supervisor, wrote a letter on Aug. 4 to Ron Tendick, director of family housing. In it, he wrote that Xiangui had contributed much to the complex and deserved a fair chance at an extension. Neet indicated in the letter that he believes family housing is inconsistent in such decisions.

Although Briggs has no say on housing decisions, Neet sent a copy of the letter to him.

Neet expressed concern that "Chinese students are often at a disadvantage in our system because they are too polite to be abrasive and wouldn't consider threats and retribution as appropriate."

Briggs responded with a letter to Tendick that was eventually shown to Xiangui.

In the letter, Briggs writes "I respect the rules you have and the difficulty in enforcing them. My experience with the Chinese (as one example used in your letter) tells me that they may be polite, but they also know how to work a system to

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