

Student union forums open to all people, even 'whiteys'



Write Angles

Tammy Batey

OK, let's review the definition of a forum, shall we. A forum, according to *Webster's New World Dictionary*, is "an assembly, program, etc. for the discussion of public matters."

Especially note the use of an important word in that definition: "public."

Last week, an Asian- and Pacific-American Student Union member gave one of my reporters a flier about an Asian/Black Relations Forum. Silly me, I actually thought I was a member of the public. I also thought the groups who sponsored the forum would appreciate a story about it to inform people who couldn't attend.

Boy, was I wrong. Before the so-called forum, Mike Kim, a Korean Student Association co-director, said he intentionally did not inform the media because he wanted a selective group of people to attend.

To keep the group selective, Kim circulated the fliers only among Black Student Union, Korean Student Association and APASU members. Kim apparently didn't think about the Asian-Americans and African-Americans not associated with these groups who might want to attend.

A Chinese-American woman said she attended the forum because she believed it would be a "safe place" for her to voice her concerns. She said she felt uncomfortable with me in the room.

Apparently this woman didn't know a forum is a public meeting. If she wanted a "safe place," she should have stayed

home in bed with her door locked.

Yes, I do admit I'm a member of the media. But that doesn't mean I'm a psychotic maniac just waiting to gun her down.

I reassured the woman I would not quote her if she didn't feel comfortable being quoted. But this was not good enough for her. She suggested a vote on whether they would let me stay.

I was hoping the vote would not be in my favor. If they had voted that I should leave, I would have made it very clear to them that I wasn't about to budge an inch. But alas, the vote was a tie and Kim, bless his heart, was kind enough to let me stay.

Tim Gleason, a journalism associate professor who teaches Mass Media Law, said the three student groups were not breaking any open-meetings law in attempting to close the forum. However, "it violates the spirit of an open forum to not let a reporter attend," he said.

Although those at the forum didn't violate a state or city law, ASUO President Bobby Lee said they did violate the ASUO Constitution by attempting to oust me.

"They can't do that," Lee said. "The groups are paid by incidental fees. A forum is generally for anyone who wants to come, and I stand by that. It's a different story if these groups want to meet at some bar, but if they want to utilize University facilities, you can't exclude someone based on race or association."

The ASUO Constitution confirms what Lee said.

"The ASUO affirms the right to all individuals to equal opportunity in education, employment and access to incidental fee-funded programs and their funded activities, without regard to race ... or any other

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considerations not directly and substantially related to effective participation," says ASUO Executive Rule 82.2.

The only exception to this rule, Lee said, would be if I was considered a "threat to someone's life." As I mentioned earlier, I don't carry any weapons. The only sharp objects I carry are pens.

Ironically, half of the people

at the meeting wanted to keep me out so they would feel comfortable. How comfortable, I wonder, will they feel when they realize people are reading about their disregard for ASUO guidelines.

The woman who first suggested I leave did not redeem herself during the rest of the meeting. She referred to white people as "whiteys," which

spurred a half-hour discussion on her use of the term.

Most people at the meeting found the term "whiteys" to be incredibly racist. The woman's reasoning was people have been using the term for years. Well, some people somewhere probably still use derogatory terms aimed at African-Americans and Asian-Americans.

One Korean-American male said the way to end racism is for all races to work together. And yes, I believe he even meant white people — or should I say "whiteys."

Tammy Batey is an associate editor for the Emerald.

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