

Bowen talks about personality, interest conflicts

Editor's Note: This is the second part of a two-part interview where former ASUO President Eric Bowen discusses some of the issues that arose during his year in office. This installment discusses some of their personality conflicts and allegations of conflict of interest.

By Edward Klopstein
Oregon Daily Emerald

Emerald: You say that one of your problems was with Diana (Collins Puente) and Eden (Ajrian-Omari). Why did you choose them in the first place?

Eric: I had a lot of faith in Diana, and she overextended herself, got burned out and wasn't being effective. Eden, on the other hand, also had wonderful potential. I feel he was effective in the early part of the year, and then somewhere down the road, he was forced to choose sides when there was tension in the office. He got caught up in that game, and once you're caught up, it's very hard to get out of it.

Emerald: Going back to the winter term when OPS broke up an argument at the ASUO and Eden told Caitilin Twain that he had a problem with her because of her "white butt," do you feel those problems came from the close relationship the ASUO had with USSA and the tensions that relationship caused?

Eric: That was a liability. When I was down in Los Angeles last summer, and five or six people from the U of O wanted to run for (USSA) board seats, the first thing I did was call up here and go, "What are our financial resources like?" I gathered as much information as I could, and I presented it to them saying, "I can't make any commitments to you to make sure you can be paid for all of this. I will do my best. Good luck, go ahead and run," not really knowing what I was getting into at the time. USSA consumed those members of the board who were also ASUO Executive staff members. So, we had Diana, Troy (Shields) and Eden — Erika (Armsbury) resigned from the board because she saw it coming — and Michelle (Parks), who later took over the Women's Center job. They were just spread too thin for issues that were just too close to their hearts, which isn't healthy. You saw how tension manifested itself.

Emerald: Looking at tension itself, tension between this office and Constitution Court's Chief Justice, Keith Kramer, was also very high. What was the problem the ASUO had with Keith?

Eric: I never had a major problem with Keith, to be honest with you. When Thomas (Huckaba) said he was going to impeach Keith, I said, "I'll support you, but I'm not going to be involved in your campaign." Overall, Keith did do a good job. He overstepped some boundaries here and there and put some hurdles in front of student government in times when it really wasn't appropriate. Rather than being the court that brings people together and helps

resolve conflict, there were a few cases that I would say he did things that were not in the best interest of the students.

Emerald: What kind of things were they?

Eric: The confusion over Ballot Measure 3 and the rec center and Ballot Measure 13. I would say that was a disservice. But, I would say there was tension between some members of my staff and the court, but not the office per se.

Emerald: When you say that the Constitution Court set up roadblocks in front of certain issues, including the rec center, isn't that their job to correct something they don't see as constitutionally correct?

Eric: Yes and no. If it is unconstitutional, then clearly they need to say that. What was happening was they were taking things that were not unconstitutional, but relied on their interpretation of state law. They were saying, "We don't think this is in line with this part of state law so we're going to stop it now and not allow you to proceed with the process."

Emerald: The court set up several injunctions last month that you said at first that you'd ignore. Later, you recognized the injunctions and didn't allow the (vote) counts for Ballot Measures 3 and 13. What was the change in thought there?

Eric: I never formally ignored or recognized. I informally ignored and informally recognized. I never wrote any public statements and never wrote any memorandums on these. I basically acted as though they were not there, until we finally declared 3 and 13 void, because at this point, they never would have got a clear yes or no. It would have been another multicultural center where people exploit things that they don't like. So, it was better to say let it die, and we'll do it next year again.

Emerald: The rumors are that Ballot Measure 3 failed.

Eric: I heard both rumors. I heard a rumor from someone who saw the results before they were getting photocopied and were blackened out. I also heard a rumor that it failed, so I heard both.

Emerald: One of the criticisms you received during the election was that you don't communicate with those that voted you into office. What have you done this year to make students more involved and aware?

Eric: My job is not to promote myself. I'm not going to go around to kiss babies and shake hands just so people know who I am. That's a waste of my time.

Emerald: So being in the limelight is not your thing, but at the same time do you think not making yourself more available to the public keeps the ASUO from gaining new ideas and new blood?

Eric: Not at all. A lot of people came into this year. I think that we have so many different people in the office this year that we're constantly bouncing ideas off each other.

Emerald: The last issue I would like to talk about is your relations with the press. When criticism started, it started from the *Oregon Commentator*. They labeled you "King Eric" because you try to control everything. How do you respond to the criticism that you were too domineering?

Eric: I am definitely going to use my influence were I can to make things better. That's my job. They, on the king

Eric story, were particularly focused around the Incidental Fee Committee. If you step back and look at what this year's fee committee did compared to what fee committees did in years before, I would argue that this fee committee has been more dedicated and more responsible than any fee committee in the past five years.

I appointed five of them by the end, and I think that those five actually improved the process. If people are going to disagree with the decisions I'm going to make, then they are going to paint me in a way that makes me look controlling. That's important. That's politics. That's (the *Commentator's*) job. They're a journal of opinion, not a paper of important news. They're commenting on government.

Emerald: Every campus publication commented on the appointment of your girlfriend, Caitilin Twain, to the IFC and your housemate, Erika Armsbury, to the ASUO multicultural advocate spot. What do you think about the press' reaction, and what do you think about those decisions themselves?

Eric: Well, the press found them titillating. The fact that Caitilin happened to be my girlfriend interests some people. If she wouldn't have been my girlfriend, you would have seen rave reviews on her appointment as you did on Preston (Cannon's). If Preston would have been my boyfriend, I'm sure the press would have made a big stink about that, too. It's titillating. But I'm not going to make that affect my appointment. I'm going to appoint the best person, regardless of my relationship with them.

Emerald: You don't feel there was a conflict of interest?

Eric: Well, if you've gone back, Caitilin was the least likely to vote for my position. If I made a position, she's the one most likely going to take a position 180 degrees opposite that position. So, if anyone's concerned about conflict of interest, the record shows quite different.

Emerald: What do you feel about Erika's appointment, and when I ask this I am referring to the house that all of you share.

Eric: When I appointed both of them, I wasn't living there.

Emerald: Exactly, but before the appointments you had a close friendship with these people and after the appointment, you were living in the same house with them. Don't you think that the way this looked warrants a closer look?

Eric: What I think that is really sad is that because of that, people have failed to look at the qualities both Caitilin and Erika have. Erika has got a wonderful history of work. She was on the USSA Board of Directors last year, she was the Women's Diversity coordinator. She applied for the multicultural advocate position.

If Eden hadn't applied and we hadn't hired him, I'm fairly confident that she would have been in that position from the beginning. When Eden resigned, and the student unions all recommend Erika as the person to replace Eden and when Leslie (Warren, current ASUO vice president) and me agree on the appointment, we appointed her. The first thing the press says is, "What about your relationship with Eric?" Well, hold on. What about Erika's relationship with everyone else, which is so good, which is why she got the position. I just think it's a shame, it's a disservice.

Bowen's year productive, but highly criticized by staff member

ASUO: Finance Coordinator Francis Neo perceived a lack of communication in office

By Amy Columbo
Oregon Daily Emerald

ASUO President Eric Bowen's year in office has been productive, but not without criticism.

During his administration, students have seen accomplishments including: the rewriting of the ASUO constitution, a revision of the incidental fee process and the restructuring of the Women's Center.

But the methods he used to achieve

these changes haven't been met with unanimous approval.

"Student leaders had to either agree with him or be silent, in order for him to pull through what he did this year," ASUO Finance Coordinator Francis Neo said. "He's very shrewd. He's the shrewdest politician that I've ever known or met."

In response to his control of the ASUO, "I definitely had lots of influence in this office, as I should; I am the ASUO President," Bowen said. "But I'm definitely not a tyrant."

Bowen said he dealt with issues by himself if he felt that was the most appro-

priate way to handle them. Bowen maintains that he worked to help facilitate what students wanted on campus.

Neo referred to Bowen as a "maestro" of the ASUO Executive. Vice-Provost for Academic Support and Student Services Gerard Moseley described Bowen as a "masterful politician."

"I would disagree with people saying I play politics; the nature of the position is very political," Bowen said. "If I had an agenda, I'd be interested to hear what it was."

Neo said that communication was a problem in Bowen's administration. As a member of the ASUO Executive staff,

Bowen often failed to communicate his vision to the rest of the staff, Neo said. Neo said, "There is a clear lack of communication between ASUO staff members."

On the issue of communication, Bowen disagreed, emphasizing instead a weekly staff meeting of Executive members. Although Bowen did not examine details during the meeting, he said, "I always kept people up on the issues."

Associate Director and University Program Consultant Frank Geltner described the ASUO administration as competent

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