

Administrator clarifies role in sit-in

First, let me set the record straight on my role here at the University and with the recent student protest.

My current position (Assistant Dean of Student Life for Multi-ethnic Student Programs) is in its first full year of existence. My job involves serving as a student advocate, working on students' turf in the ethnic unions and Multicultural Center and serving as an administrator and employee for the institution.

Regarding the recent protest at Johnson Hall, my presence was to serve as a peacemaker and advocate, especially because the administration understood my dilemma and the very political nature of my position.

My involvement with students should have been viewed as positive, as opposed to not having a presence at all. I know it was divine intervention that a number of factors made this protest a peaceful one.

I am, therefore, extremely thankful that my colleagues and supervisors in the Office of Student Life were there to help diffuse tensions (Wes Morrill, Laura Blake Jones, Stephanie Carnahan and Elaine Green).

These individuals assisted the police and upper administration to understand my role in this situation and to view my presence as a supporter, especially in light of the very delicate nature of my job.

The police took each student down one by one. As the last student was escorted downstairs in Johnson Hall, Morrill, dean of Student Life, pulled me to the nearby steps and gave his support of my involvement and understood my role. Also, the head of the Office of Public Safety thanked me for being there in moral support.

I was not arrested. I just sat with the students for moral support.

I did receive some stern backlash during the process; however,

this tight-rope act was a way to further bridge the gap between students and the administration. I am an administrator — but one who understands how important it is to help shape the environment and policies that help students better navigate on campus.

Creating a supportive environment is a shared responsibility. Faculty share half the responsibility for what happens to students during their college years.

Commentary
Troy Franklin, Ph.D.

However, students have a good feel for the campus culture, so if we continue to silence their voices, we may be shooting ourselves in the foot.

Yes, there is light at the end of the tunnel of the little progress that has been made regarding diversity, but let's just hope that light isn't a train!

My point stresses the importance for us to revisit the past (unmet resources and services outlined in the Task Force for Racial Diversity Executive Report).

Now that I have been able to revisit my role in the students' protest, I am more convinced that the University needs more representation on various levels regarding diverse voices at the table. I often feel like my job is the three jobs the Task Force for Racial Diversity Committee originally outlined — a voice in Johnson Hall, student advocate and multicultural representative — rolled in one.

At times, this balance is very time consuming. But the protest, as I stated to the students, made it clear of the importance of having a voice at the table behind the scene to advocate for students. Students understand the pressures of my job and have expressed this to me. I truly appreciate this.

Students also know I support them, and I work hard to maintain a balance in striving to build stronger bridges with administration.

This role of wearing numerous hats related to my position can lead to burnout, particularly when there is not a solid diversity support system throughout campus. It is necessary to have other support on various levels.

Students need to have input in creating long- and short-term plans. I am in no way advocating that students engage in hostile negotiations. I am a strong believer in positive coalition building and assisting students in developing life skills.

Students should have a voice in the Process for Change, a voice in the possible reorganization of Student Affairs and a voice in the prospect of bringing back the vice president for student affairs position.

These are critical areas that need student input. I give University President Dave Frohn-mayer and Executive Assistant President Dave Hubin credit for being receptive in listening to my concerns during my first year here.

Now, it is time to reconsider plans, such as the Task Force for Racial Diversity Report, that were less than half carried out and issues addressed by the students to avoid reinventing the wheel.

Since the student protest, it has been refreshing to see the collaborative efforts between faculty and students in bringing issues to the table regarding institutional and social change. Empowering students and listening to their voices is a step in making this institution a more comfortable environment.

This act of listening will help strengthen community connections to diverse populations throughout Oregon now and well into the 21st Century.

Troy Franklin, Ph.D., is the assistant dean of Student Life for Multi-ethnic Student Programs.

Today's Events

Tuesday, May 25

■ Tony Waldrop from the University of Illinois discusses "Challenges Facing Higher Education" as one of three candidates for vice provost for research and graduate studies at 1 to 2:30 p.m. in the Knight Library Browsing Room. It includes a question-and-answer session, and a reception will follow.

low. For information, call Dee Tipping at 346-2084.

■ Richard Demars, a candidate for the vacant Office of Public Safety Director position, will be available to the campus community during his final interview at 3 to 4 p.m. in the EMU Fir Room. After making a brief presentation, Demars will answer questions of importance to OPS.



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