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Committed to Cultural Diversity

PSU Black Studies at Risk, Professor says



PHOTO BY BEVERLY CORBELL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Professor Ethan Johnson, who heads up the Black Studies Department at Portland State University, says he doesn't feel like celebrating the department's 50th anniversary because the university is failing to support the department and even more is failing to listen to the concerns of minority students and teachers at the school.

Administration called out for toxic environment

BY BEVERLY CORBELL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

This school year is the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Black Studies Department at Portland State University, a momentous occasion for celebrating the formation of a degree curriculum devoted

to the history, culture and politics of black people, but the African-American director of the department doesn't feel much like celebrating.

Ethan Johnson, who has headed the department for the past 15 years, says the university is failing to support the black studies curriculum and even more is failing to listen to the concerns of minority students and faculty at the school, a result that is disastrous to their wellbeing.

In a blistering four-page letter, Johnson accounts for the dismal support PSU

gives his department and for black students on campus in general, from the arming of campus security with guns to not supporting black professors and administrators for hiring and promotion, issues he believes affects the health and even threatens the lives of black employees and students at PSU.

As an example, Johnson said that it was not long after the school's Board of Trustees, whom he referred to as "an unelected group of overwhelmingly white men" voted to form a campus police force, that Jason Washington, a black man, U.S.

Veteran, postal worker and father of two, was killed by campus police on the edge of PSU campus. Johnson said virtually all faculty and students were opposed to arming PSU security.

Added to that danger, Johnson says, as shown in peer-reviewed articles, is that the stress of daily doses of racism affects overall health as it "gets into our bodies and overworks us, causing breakdowns in our hearts, reproductive systems and other

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