

# Ball said he had no direct warning

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A. Kennedy recalled, "There had been talk with the university's Native American Advisory Group, hints that there were going to be changes, but no proposal was ever rolled out."

Former University President Richard W. Lariviere "talked about running all minority groups together, talked about some of its benefits, a couple years ago."

Ball said that though he had no direct warning of the restructuring, "I started getting an inkling of this last year in a staff meeting when Robin Holmes, interim vice president (for what was then the Office of Equity and Diversity), started using the term Office of Equity and Inclusion."

"I asked where it came from, but nobody knew who changed it. That started concerning me, a change in the name of the office and nobody knew anything about it."

The words and actions from the vice president's office have been interpreted in many quarters as representing the so-called "distributed model" of maintaining diversity, where everybody is responsible for all diversity issues.

While the model has been embraced by universities, it is not considered a best practice in Indian Country.

"The 'distributed model' does not work," said Leno with input from the Tribe's Education Department. "We have seen other colleges and universities in Oregon try to implement this model of lumping underrepresented/minority students into one group and it has not been successful."

"Native American students have unique needs and therefore need to have specific staff — Native American preferred — and services at the university. Our students come from unique backgrounds and sovereign nations. They recognize their uniqueness and often require the support of people who recognize, respect and appreciate the Nations they come from and their sovereignty."

"The 'distributed model,'" said Bryan Mercier, manager of Business Operations of the Bonneville Power Administration's Fish and Wildlife Program, another Hatfield Fellow and a 1990's graduate of the university, "is a common practice with an organization that is downsizing."

"Would you lay off staff, push their work onto the already full plates of other staff and not expect the quality of services to suffer? Of course we would expect that to happen. That's why this decision is all the more disappointing. The UofO administration has to recognize this will have negative consequences for Native students."

In addition, said Ball and Kennedy, Tribal peoples alone have



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~ New Equity and Inclusion Vice President Yvette Alex-Assensoh

treaty rights by which their education has been prepaid by the ceding of millions of acres of land. In the case of Native Americans, the question is not that they are an ethnic group deserving of special benefits, but that they are treaty signers for whom U.S. governments have legal obligations.

"Our genuine concern (about this) has been there," said Kennedy, "and continues to be there. To water down that obligation is inappropriate."

The issue brings with it enough heat that state officials are looking for clarification.

Quigley said she will meet with university leaders about the issue and Frank Garcia Jr., director of the Gov. John Kitzhaber's Office of Diversity & Inclusion and Affirmative Action, also is looking into it.

Alex-Assensoh's memorandum to Tribal Council said that the restructuring will include "recruiting new employees, with the requisite expertise, to address organizational changes that respond to institutional, Tribal government and community needs."

She said she hoped the restructuring "will provide more specific and efficient attention to structural and policy issues in each of these areas, as well as link her office more effectively with the other campus units that also work on these important issues. It will also engage diverse communities through a series of leadership roundtables that facilitate connections between campus and community organizations."

"People aren't aware," said Alison Ball, "that the three assistant vice presidents were working throughout campus. In all departments."

Jennifer O'Neal, hired in June as the university's Corrigan Solari Historian and Archivist, said that Ball "immediately included" her in the Native Strategies group for faculty and staff to work across the university to make things happen quicker for the Indian community.

Tom Ball points to his work developing the Native Strategies group as an example of his successful communication efforts, and one of the high points of his years in the office.

"The reason I started it was the level of bureaucracy here," Ball said. "We had six areas that we couldn't move forward on: a Native research center; Native studies; recruitment and retention; communications about all we are doing on campus; community outreach to Tribes; and governance and infrastructure funding."

"A program adviser with the cultural, political, legal knowledge of Indian Country provides a resource for the unique circumstances that nearly all Indian students face when entering college," said Mercier. "There's simply no way all the faculty can acquire that capacity, so letting a specialist go for the 'distributed model' is a huge mistake and Indian students will suffer as a consequence."

"When most public institutions are just now figuring out the need for designated personnel to handle Tribal issues, it seems UofO, a supposedly progressive organization, is going backwards. Federal agencies, state governments and even the White House have recently created positions, such as senior advisers on Indian Affairs, to increase their capacity to better serve Tribal communities."

The failure to include Tribes in the process is part of a larger failing, many say, and there are indications that university leaders know it.

"I do believe UofO is acutely aware that they should have consulted with Oregon Tribes and with their own advisory committee," wrote Quigley in an e-mail.

University staff and professors also feel that they have been left in the dark.

"I think the biggest change will

be just trying to understand how the office will now operate," said O'Neal. "Who will we contact about current and future projects? And who will focus on the issues facing Native American faculty and students? There are just still so many unanswered questions. I'm trying to be optimistic, but when you don't know what the procedures and policies will be it is very difficult to know what the future holds."

At the same time, Ball and others are hopeful that this setback could translate into something better. The road there would include a position that is a liaison between the Tribes and university president and reports directly to the president.

"We need to move this position out from under the (vice president's) Office of Equity and Inclusion," said Tom Ball. He also would like to see the relationship between the university and Tribes spelled out in binding documents.

"This position never should have been under another level of bureaucracy ... with a vice president that does not know our Tribes, does not understand sovereignty and does not know the unique cultural needs of our Native students, and does not have a clue as to what Tribal consultation means."

"The restructuring," wrote Alex-Assensoh in the Tribal Council memorandum, "will allow us to build on existing partnerships to do even more in the future. I respect the high priority of education for Tribal governments. We have that priority in common."

Quigley sees the bumps smoothing out. With assurances by the President's Office that "there is no intention on the part of UofO to back away from their commitment to Native students or their interest in a positive long-term relationship with the federally recognized Tribal governments of Oregon," she added, "I am hopeful that we can use this opportunity to get the UofO relationship back on a firm and positive footing going forward."

"Moving forward," said Leno, "we would be willing to sit down with the university to discuss our concerns about the elimination of Dr. Ball's position."

"There is that possibility that something really good could come out of it," said Tom Ball. ■

## Education offers Chinuk Wawa classes

The Tribe's Cultural Education Department offers adult Chinuk Wawa language classes from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday in Room 207 of the Tribal Education Building. Language classes can be taken for college credit or fun. For more information, call 503-879-2249 or 503-437-4599. ■

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