

A Letter from Concerned Alumni

Friday, Sept. 18, 2020

Dear Wofford College trustees:

President Samhat and his senior staff graciously met with us earlier this month and discussed the controversial June 6 English Department statement, signed and disseminated by faculty members and others who allege rampant current, past and systemic racial inequities and discrimination at the college. The statement is attached along with a list of related student anti-racism coalition demands that have been reported in both the Spartanburg and Greenville newspapers.

Following are the statement's false charges, and we ask that each of you read them carefully:

— “Wofford cannot achieve beneficial, equitable and inclusive relationships without publicly acknowledging that racial inequality is our immediate reality, not simply our historical past. The college must facilitate healing on campus ... beginning with identifying and addressing systemic, long-term and daily practices that perpetuate white supremacy.”

— There is a “cycle of racial violence on our students and colleagues at Wofford College ... shared by other Wofford academic and administrative departments ...”

— The English Department advocates continuous volatility on campus when stating: “We reject efforts that seek to restore stability and maintain the status quo over seeking justice.”

After presenting the three aforementioned inaccuracies, we asked President Samhat for evidence to support these charges to include documents, incident reports, internal memoranda, policy statements and any other verification. No proof was provided. We asked if the faculty statement reflected the college's official position. He said it did not.

We noted that the charges give rise to causes of action for defamation and placing the untarnished honor of our venerable, private, Southern liberal arts college in a false light — two actionable claims under South Carolina law. We did so not as a threat but only to underscore the seriousness of the matter. We stressed that the falsehoods have already damaged Wofford's excellent reputation as well as its recruitment potential, and requested that they be refuted for the sake of the college now and in the future. We underscored the fact that, based on our discussions with many other Wofford graduates, the faculty's allegations and aberrant behavior have eroded interest and support of alumni and friends, and threaten financial support.

In addition, we asked what role Wofford's new assistant dean of diversity and inclusion played in formulating the faculty statement, which she was the first to sign. We asked if all the professors who signed it knew exactly what the final version said. We had been told it did not. We asked the president to explain the purpose, cost-effectiveness and results to date of the college's diversity and inclusiveness department's anti-racism classes, seminars and teach-in series regarding racial problems on and off campus. Again, we got no answer. We noted that some of the programs appear to indoctrinate students rather than encouraging them to discuss the issue openly and honestly.

Our questions were quite simple: Is the goal to teach students “how” to think, or is it “what” to think? Are the assistant dean of diversity and the English professors supposed to push political agendas and talking points on their students in class and elsewhere? We received no answers.

We asked about the student anti-racism coalition's well-publicized and puerile demands upon the college. We noted that alumni are especially concerned about a demand for a change of the names of dormitories that honor Wofford's first three presidents. We were relieved when told the anti-racism coalition does not represent the views of most students — minority and otherwise — on campus. We asked why this had not been made public in response to recent newspaper articles about the coalition's demands. Again, no answer.

Lastly, we underscored the importance of informing the alumni about sensitive racial matters, and noted a core tenet of a Wofford College liberal arts education: To teach the importance of seeking out the truth when considering crucial matters, how to validate findings and to inspire students to do so the rest of their lives for the betterment of all people everywhere.

Now we respectfully ask the trustees to carefully consider our request to hear directly from our spokesman Hunter Quick during the October board meeting for the purpose of having him further explain our concerns, answer questions and ask the trustees to make clear Wofford College's position on this important matter. We asked both President Samhat and his staff to include Mr. Quick on the agenda, but our requests were denied.

Also, please note that we have promised fellow alumni to update them on our meeting with the administration, and we hope to tell them the trustees agree with the president and his administration staff that the English faculty statement is unfortunate and inaccurate, and it does not represent the college's official position.

Thank you very much!

Hunter Quick ('71), Bucko Brant ('72), Carroll Player ('60) and John M. Burbage ('70)