

Which Way, Wofford?

A message from:

Alumni for the Wofford Way, Inc.

In defense of core values of Wofford College, founded 1854, Spartanburg, S.C.

Wofford College's Administration has asked the Board of Trustees to approve 30 more extreme, unscored recommendations to transform our alma mater by adopting so-called principles of "justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI)" and "integrating them into every aspect of its operations to prepare students to be active citizens who contribute, serve and thrive in a diverse world." Alumni for the Wofford Way, Inc. is alarmed by the Administration's push for expensive, unnecessary recommendations (posted in full at www.alumniwoffordway.com). We ask our distinguished Trustees to carefully consider each proposal and the likely ramifications. We appeal to them to avoid taking the college in an unsound, misguided direction when the Board meets Aug. 5-6 or any time thereafter.

The JEDI proposals advocate numerous, radical changes to the proven, rational and flexible way our venerable, Methodist-supported college has operated since its founding 167 years ago. Wofford has long had a distinguished reputation as one of the most enlightened, enterprising liberal arts colleges in the nation, and will continue to thrive without adopting factious JEDI affectations that, in effect, exploit racial and cultural differences and segregate students, faculty, staff and alumni. We've heard from a broad cross-section of them and are not surprised that students, faculty and staff especially are hesitant to openly challenge the Administration for fear of jeopardizing their futures in today's cancel-culture climate.

For more than a year we've asked repeatedly for permission to address the assembled Trustees to express reasoned, heartfelt concerns about JEDI initiatives. Yet the Administration refused to allow even one of our representatives a spot on the Board's agendas. Thus Alumni for the Wofford Way, Inc. has resorted to public venues to document apprehensions and establish a more deliberate approach to enhancing Wofford's reputation in an ever-changing world. We are now in touch with thousands of concerned alumni, all of whom love the college. Many have sent sons, daughters and others to Wofford, and want to continue supporting it financially, spiritually, socially, through bequests and in other ways. But they are dispirited by the Administration's extremeness in asserting exaggerated or otherwise non-existent problems.

We ask the Trustees to reject or significantly modify these drastic, far-reaching proposals, including name changes of dormitories that honor Wofford's first three presidents solely because they legally owned enslaved people. Doing so will not erase historic facts or the existence of the detestable institution of slavery. Such faulty logic questions whether Wofford College's name itself must be discarded because the college's founder, the Rev. Benjamin Wofford, and his wife also owned slaves.

One proposal seeks new "buildings and safe spaces for students who feel threatened and marginalized." The exorbitant expense required, in effect, would perpetuate myths of student victimhood and systemic racism, thus encouraging senseless divisiveness, not unity. A pivotal example of such recklessness occurred last year when Wofford's English faculty preposterously and publicly published under a Wofford letterhead a Statement that included concerns about a "cycle of racial violence on our students and colleagues at Wofford College." When pressed for official incident reports, college President Nayef Samhat and his cabinet admitted there were none. Still, President Samhat declined to correct or even clarify the record in straightforward and timely fashion. False claims proffered by professors who should know better were political and admittedly based on unconfirmed, mostly unsigned stories on a Black at Wofford internet site. Rumor-mongering and anti-racism propaganda should have no standing on our campus.

We question a proposal to "correct inequities in opportunities and outcomes" for minority and other diverse students in major course studies. Changing course loads and grading systems to attract and retain certain students is alarming. Such schemes, including abandonment of entrance testing and allowing negotiated test scores between students and professors, promotes mediocrity. Recruiting and enabling students who can't keep up in the name of JEDI "equity" is not the Wofford Way. "Equity" does not mean "equality." The first insures an equal outcome, without the necessity of merit; equality guarantees an equal opportunity to succeed. Wofford historically has promoted equality, fairness and excellence in students and faculty. Turning a classroom into an entertaining, free-form discussion venue minus standard grading requirements slashes a professor's out-of-classroom workload, but does little to challenge student intellect or document one's ability to express orally and in writing knowledge of specific subjects.

Another recommendation includes a dogmatic freshman "orientation" program on social justice and equity issues in addition to the Administration's ongoing imposition of a woke-minded "Racism 101 Tool Kit" that promotes group-think philosophy which stresses "what to think" rather than "how to think." This is not the vaunted Wofford Way of meeting challenges. However, President Samhat writes that "too often, the Wofford Way is used as a reason to dismiss change." Dr. Lewis Jones — the late Wofford history professor, author and beloved alumnus — would have taken exception to this. He lectured profoundly that the Wofford Way is an enlightened ideal based on character, intellect, wisdom, scholarship, openness, determination, loyalty and harmony, especially when facing difficult challenges against overwhelming odds. Indeed, Wofford Terriers are tenacious, confident in their knowledge, disciplined in action, quick to adjust to unexpected challenges, respectful of opponents when victorious and gracious in defeat ... Most of us still are.

JEDI recommendations, alumni letters and related news articles compiled in the past year by Alumni for the Wofford Way Inc. are available at:

www.alumniwoffordway.com

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