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University actions lack consistency and logic

By Aaron Hanlon
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Just as it was with Little League umpires, we can all tolerate and forgive erroneous judgment calls from authoritative bodies so long as they demonstrate some semblance of fairness and consistency. Otherwise, blatant hypocrisy stacked on what was already a bad move makes for a most calamitous outcome, such as in our current situation: A tenacious mother is spreading propaganda throughout the University community, including lengthy letters to parents. Students are squirming with insecurities over whether or not they can feel protected from sexual assault or a false accusation of sexual assault. Credibility is being questioned all over the place. At least one student has been forced to tolerate the pain of this commotion on top of post-traumatic stress. And to make matters much, much worse, the University has failed to make a statement to the campus community regarding Christina Abdulghani's inappropriate response to the Board of Trustees' decision to expel her son, Tareq Abdulghani.

Not long ago, the student publication, The Counterweight, incited University administrators into a frenzy. Once the issue took flight with national media and drew complaints from many alumni (many of whom were perennial donors), the University released a barrage of defenses and clarifications. Dean of Students Richard Ferraro sent out a campuswide e-mail, and Associate Director of Public Relations Alan Janesch sent out many e-mails, press releases and official University statements. The campus community, along with the rest of the world, was informed of the University's position on Counterweight-related matters.

Fast forward to now-another campuswide controversy has sparked similar discussion, confusion and consequential emotional reactions within the University community. When I asked several University administrators where the big University statement was in light of all the faulty information that has been dissipated over this past month, I received the same seemingly plausible answer over and over again: "We are waiting for the appeals procedures

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to end," waiting for the figurative green light to speed through the intersection of Litigation and Liability. On the surface this seems an entirely legitimate excuse. After considering the details of past University crisis management actions, the fear-of-crossing-the-law excuse is incredible.

In spite of what it has consistently maintained as a direct threat of litigation against the University by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education for the University's libelous statements against The Counterweight and its staff, the University has continued to publicly stand by said libelous statements in spite of the attached legal ramifications. Clearly, the University is not afraid of being sued for issuing statements that could potentially justify litigation. While I am not suggesting that there should have been a libelous or misleading statement issued similar to that which was issued after the Counterweight controversy, I strongly believe that the University, whose regulations and procedures have called for the expulsion of Abdulghani, should have issued a statement in support of its actions long ago.

The absence of such an explicit statement paints a vivid picture of the University's current state of mixed-up priorities. When a student publication pointedly criticized specific University policies and administrators in the limelight of national media coverage, the deans and the public relations department scrambled for a position and publicly stuck by it while the threat of litigation lingered. Now, a student has been sexually assaulted and subsequently libeled on a Web site and slandered by ignorant students on a daily basis. Still, the University has made no statement to fortify its actions, hiding behind a supposed fear of giving ammunition to Ms. Abdulghani's case. In so doing, it has failed to help protect thousands of its students who are in many cases unaware of the facts. With The Counterweight, the University impulsively involved itself when it was certainly not needed. Now, it has taken a seemingly nonchalant and laissez-faire approach in perhaps one of the only instances in which students would benefit from the authoritative University standing up for its position against a noticeably well-financed propaganda machine. The University should have already issued (but must now issue) a statement to the campus community in support of its actions with the same urgency with which it issued past statements about The Counterweight, but with a new and improved regard for factual information. Though it may seem a bit much for me to demand the best of both worlds, we should be aware of the fact that our current situation is much more severe than previous ones involving words on pages. Here, it seems as though a true crime has been committed. The University's actions in ridding our campus of certain individuals indicate a commitment to campus safety; but in this commitment it should never waver, never give in and never, ever equivocate.

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