University of Maryland students protest firing of diversity officer, 2009

4 November
2009
to: 5 November
2009

Country: United States
Location City/State/Province: College Park, Maryland

Goals:
1) Professor Cordell Black’s reinstatement 2) The release of all the University's budget and diversity records 3) A moratorium on further layoffs and reorganizations until students, faculty, and staff were given a say in decisions.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 013. Deputations

Classifications

Classification:
Defense
Cluster:
Human Rights
Group characterization:

- college and university students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
STARE
Partners:
Black Student Union, Latino Student Union
External allies:
Faculty, Alumni, Other UMD students
Involvement of social elites:
Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Alumni
- BSU
- Faculty
- LSU
- Other students

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Segment Length: Approximately 4 hours
Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
University of Maryland Administration

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
None known

Campaigner violence:
None known

Repressive Violence:
None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
4 points out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
1 point out of 3 points

In November of 2009, a student-organized group at the University of Maryland, College Park, known as STARE (Students Taking Action to Reclaim our Education) formed to act against the cutting of student services at the University. The group, along with other students at the University, feared that the school was “quietly retreating” from its commitment to and stance on racial and cultural diversity at the University. A budget failure at the University resulted in the termination of several faculty positions and student programs, all of which affected the minority communities at the University. The state government of Maryland lessened it’s financial support for the school by ten percent due to the economic recession, consequentially forcing the school to cut positions and programs, as well as raise the tuition. As a result, students formed the group STARE to help combat these position cuts. On November 5, 2009, STARE focused it’s efforts on a student rally to protest the laying off of a particular staff member, Dr. Cordell Black.

The Wednesday night before the rally (November 4), a meeting was held to plan the rally and discuss demands. Three demands were drafted by the STARE group: Black’s reinstatement, the release of all the University’s budget and diversity records, and a moratorium on further layoffs and reorganizations until students, faculty, and staff were given a say in decisions. The University had argued that they needed to fire Black because his position at the school (the Officer for equity and diversity) was costing them too much and in order to save money they would reinvent the position to a part-time job to be held by another professor. However, because Black was a tenured professor at the University, he was allowed to stay on as a faculty member. According to University President Dan Mote, the money the department would save from cutting Black’s position would go to other diversity programs on campus. However, Provost Nariman Farvardin said that if Black chose to stay on as a tenured French Literature professor, the University would virtually acquire no net savings because the expense of his salary would be transferred from the Diversity and Equity office to the Foreign Language Department. Students felt extremely uncomfortable with such sketchy information, and felt that the school was hiding things from them and making decisions for reasons other than those stated.

To combat these decisions, STARE went forward with the November 5 protest. 600 Students along with faculty, alumni, and University officials all gathered outside of the Nyrumburu Cultural Center on the University campus, and marched together across Mckeldin Mall towards the Administration Building at the foot of campus. They chanted “Bring Back Black!”, “No Justice, No Peace!”, “This is what diversity looks like!”, along with other statements. The students filled the front steps of the
Admin building, and several student leaders from STARE, the Black Student Union, and the Latino Student Union, spoke in front of the crowd to gain support and raise energy. Participators were then given colored sheets of paper to write their appeals and demands upon, and taped the papers all over the administration building. Students then stood in front of the glass front doors and stared in at the building, in silence. The rally lasted about two hours. A petition to reinstate Black was also passed around at the rally.

The University brought police to the event, though no violence broke out and police did not detain any students. The police did escort several student leaders into the Administration building during the protest so they could meet with Provost Farvardin to discuss their demands. He told the students that he, along with the President and other members of the board, were going to stand firm in their decision to remove Dr. Black’s position from the payroll. He also told students he would work with them on their two other demands, however, by allowing a few students seats in the next meetings to make cost cutting decisions, as well as by sharing budget documents with STARE. The students were told that there were no plans to dismantle any of the diversity programs at the University, despite rumors that the University was going to cut several programs and combine several academic departments (Black Studies, Latino Studies, Women’s Studies, and LGBTQ Studies).

Following the rally and meeting with Farvardin, students were still unhappy with the University’s decision to cut Black’s position along with other’s at the school. Several more meetings were held to plan other protests, but none ever took place as Black announced that he accepted the University’s decision to remove his position, and was going to look elsewhere for work. He mentioned that he had received several offers from other Universities, and was looking for some type of administration job that would allow him to have more of an influence on social issues than he did as a Literature Professor. In 2010, Black took a sabbatical to compile all of his speeches. As of 2012, Black is still teaching at the University of Maryland as an associate French Literature Professor while working on his social justice campaigns on the side.

Research Notes

Sources:

Hampton, Adele and Lang, Marissa. "600 Protest Diversity Cuts". The Diamondback Newspaper, Published Nov. 6th, 2009”. <http://admin2.collegepublisher.com/preview/mobile/2.1775/2.1776/1.863305>


Additional Notes:
The Diamondback is the University of Maryland Student Run Newspaper.
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