

Students have spoken – now UB needs to listen

BSU and SA instrumental in leading UB toward a better SPECTRUM community, UB needs to assist them
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The “White Only” and “Black Only” signs that appeared on campus two weeks ago shocked the university. Debates have ensued over artistic freedom, race relations and campus policies.

The Student Association and Black Student Union (BSU) strove in the aftermath to provide support for those troubled by the event, like last Wednesday’s open forum.

Students at the forum spoke of everything from UB’s response to the signs to race relations on campus.

The creation of these discussions and the strong reactions from both BSU and SA provided some reassurance that student leadership took this event seriously.

Now UB needs to do their part. It’s clear UB as a university fell gravely short in dealing with the crisis initially. Barbra Ricotta, associate vice president of student affairs, admitted as much at Wednesday’s forum. With reportedly insensitive reactions from University Police dispatchers, no alert being sent out about the signs and President Satish Tripathi taking more than a week to release a statement on the issue, there was failure on many levels.

UB seems to be on the path to righting some of its wrongs. Tripathi released a statement to students and Wednesday’s forum included some positive discussion from UB officials, like possible creation of a colored advisory committee to meet with UPD.

But now the university needs to

follow through.

First, the problems related to UPD come as systemic and widespread.

Students said dispatchers downplayed the event when they called about the signs. While UB is investigating the tapes of the dispatcher calls, which is good to hear, it’s alarming to hear dispatchers may not have taken students’ fears seriously.

Another troubling development was a student’s claim an officer blamed the signs for not allowing police to respond to an assault on South Campus. UPD should have been able to tend to an assault and what could have been a hate crime at the same time.

How many officers are on campus?

One black male student also said a UPD officer once asked him if he was even a student when he asked where the library was on South Campus. The issues there are obvious.

Another point of criticism lies with the administration’s response. No kind of alert was put out, which casts judgment of the administration in doubt. Before it was revealed to be an art project, students had legitimate concerns the signs were a hate crime.

Adding onto this uncertainty was Tripathi’s delay in releasing a statement. While the university put out several statements quickly regarding the signs – which we appreciate – students should have heard from their president.

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Listening to students at the forum, it was clear they wanted to hear from their president. It should not have taken more than a week for students to get that.

The delay and confusion makes it seem a day late and a dollar short.

Finally, the question of Ashley Powell, the student who hung the signs, must be addressed. Clearly there needs to be repercussions and public ones at that. The university has condemned what happened and stated that the rules were violated in posting such signs. Now it needs to take some action to back up their words, or students will completely lose faith in the administration.

While we don't feel Powell's opportunity to get an education here should be taken away, there has to be some repercussion for her, her professors or anyone who had knowledge of her project.

Black students clearly feel that UB is divided along racial lines. One student at the forum pointed out how most of the attendees were not white. Another student said he's trying to reinstate an NAACP chapter at UB.

The calls for diversity training for faculty, in addition to the diversity classes planned for the general education program, seems much more reasonable if these kinds of attitudes are prevalent on campus.

The campus needs to move quickly, decisively and publicly in its efforts to reassure present and future minority students.

Otherwise, UB might not be viewed as a welcome school for minority students anymore.