

Awaiting answers

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BSU protests Tripathi's address, looks for further response to 'White Only' art project

President Satish Tripathi held his fourth annual State of the University Address on Friday morning, but the speech was overshadowed by a protest in the audience.

Members of the Black Student Union (BSU) held a peaceful protest during and after the address in response to the "White Only" and "Black Only" signs hung around campus by graduate fine arts student Ashley Powell last month. Students stood and raised white posters that read "We Want Answers" and left early to stand in the Slee Hall lobby and protest as people grabbed refreshments Friday.

Tripathi has met with student leadership, including BSU and the People of Color Council, and wrote an open letter to the student body in *The Spectrum* about the project — but BSU wants more.

Before the address, BSU posted a series of questions on social media they wanted Tripathi to answer "publically, candidly and with urgency," such as, "What is art? What is academic freedom? [and] Where does the university draw the line between freedom of expression and overt demonstration of cultural trauma?" BSU also said it expected Tripathi to address University Police dispatchers' "insensitive responses to concerned individuals" who called to report the signs.

Tiffany Vera, BSU secretary and a senior speech and hearing science major, said she appreciates Tripathi's acknowledgement of the issue but wanted him to answer BSU's questions and address its concerns sooner.

"We designed this peaceful protest to show Tripathi that we aren't coming at him in a violent, aggressive or hostile way but we want to show them we are serious about what we want to accomplish," Vera said. "We want things to be done not just for us but for all People of Color organizations and all UB students."

After he concluded his address, Tripathi said he supports the students' protest.

"I think [the protest] is really good and it is good for them to do what they feel is right," Tripathi said. "We are looking at all of these points from all angles, from the faculty, freedom of speech and the First Amendment."

During the address, Tripathi told the audience that College of Arts and Sciences is dealing with this "difficult conversation and [is] determining the boundaries."



PHOTOS BY
KAINAN GUO, THE SPECTRUM

(TOP) A student holds a #WeWantAnswers sign after President Satish Tripathi's State of the University Address on Friday in Slee Hall.

(MIDDLE) Black Student Union (BSU) e-board member James Battle (far right) holds a sign in protest after President Satish Tripathi's address.

(BOTTOM) President Satish Tripathi speaks with BSU President Micah Oliver after his address on Friday.

Tripathi also touched on positive news in his address as he emphasized UB's recent achievements, from three Mid-American Conference Championships won last year to the newly named Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences to UB's low student debt.

He emphasized UB's "points of pride," such as the Communities of Excellence and the School of Dental Medicine and applauded the UB students succeeding in both the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and on Broadway.

He noted that UB's graduation rates are above the national average and the Finish in 4 program is a success in helping students graduate on time.

Tripathi also brought up the lack of attention to South Campus. He said UB plans for ensuring a safer community on South Campus to reflect the success of UB's two other campuses.

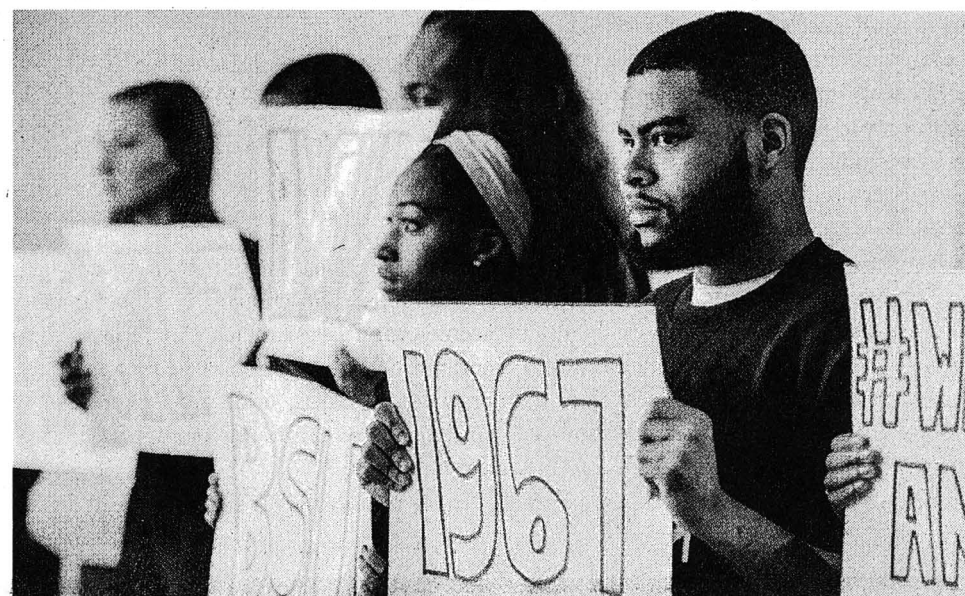
He said the construction of the downtown campus has caused a population deficit on South Campus and because of this, UB is moving the Graduate School of Education and School of Social Work to South Campus.

Throughout the majority of Tripathi's address, he reiterated the importance of "Buffalo's renaissance."

But BSU feels there are other changes that need to be made first.

Vera said BSU wants to work with UB to fulfill its expectations but feels that Tripathi and the administration aren't pursuing the issue enough.

According to Deidree Golbourne, BSU vice president and a junior African American studies major, Tripathi will not be able



to meet with BSU until Nov. 4. Golbourne said she wants something to be addressed in the meantime.

"What about before that? The conversation ceased after the forum but there's still a lot to talk about," Golbourne said.

Tripathi said he looks forward to meeting with BSU members to continue the discussion.

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