

WHAT HE WROTE... [SLIGHTLY SHORTENED BECAUSE IT WAS SO DAMN LONG. READ YOUR STUDENT EMAIL FOR THE FULL BIT.]

Dear Western Community,

I am writing to you about Western's Ethnic Student Center. The current space is inadequate. I could give you paragraphs of stats but this picture says it all.

This is the kind of challenge we should be pleased to have. As Western has become ever more diverse – and, as our students of color have become ever more engaged and active in enriching the quality of campus life – facilities built for an earlier era fail to meet the needs of today. And, thinking ahead to an increasingly diverse Western, you can see why this matter deserves our full attention.

And that it has had. Our full attention. Including me and beginning several years ago.

The initial plan, collaboratively developed with the Associated Students (AS) leadership at the time, was to expand the ESC... Probably a good thing that such planning took time. As time passed, we worked collaboratively, listening to each other, and it became apparent that the initial expansion plan was not going to be adequate given future needs.

Again seeking to work collaboratively, students and administrators have been looking at approaches around the country: the nature of the facilities, the focus of the programming therein, and the creative fiscal arrangements allowing for construction and operation.

A lot has been learned. I confidently believe Western is in a position to establish a facility adequate to the needs of today. And, foreseeably, tomorrow. We are now talking improvements well beyond where we were aiming several years ago. By and large, the understandings and commitments are in place. Are there holdups to continuing progress? Any impediments I worry about are not primarily budgetary. The potentially more debilitating impediments have to do with our capacities to collaboratively problem solve.

Universities move forward because people of good will listen, learn, problem-solve and, yes, compromise. While getting irrevocably locked in has not happened at Western, it is why any who choose to lock themselves into "non-negotiable demands" do, regrettably in my view, make themselves immediately irrelevant when it comes to the ways in which effective universities collaboratively move forward.

Consider, for example, getting irrevocably locked into the position that the future needs for the Ethnic Student Center can only be met by a separate, stand-alone building. There are no vacant or under-utilized buildings at Western. Is, then, a new building a realistic possibility?

Proposals for buildings go through our transparent, on the web, 10-year capital projects planning process. That allows the many capital project needs to be comparatively assessed by all of us with final decisions on priorities made by our Board of Trustees. Right now, remodeling and expansion of our seriously out-of-date Environmental Sciences building is Western's top priority capital project.

But, suppose we all agreed to move an ESC building to the top of the list. No matter how hard we lobbied down in Olympia, we would not be able to get a state funded ESC building. Competition for state funding is intense – we see a new major capital project maybe once every five to seven years – and the State only funds buildings for programs that are also funded by the state; basically, these are our academic programs.

That is why the state funded the remodeling and expansion of the academic spaces in Carver but did not pay for any improvements in the intercollegiate athletic facilities. And, we got that academic part of Carver only after 20 years of intense effort. The state will not fund a new ESC building. So, that leaves student fees for the funding of facilities for programs like the ESC that are student activity-oriented (and funded). That is why the Wade King Student Recreation Center, for example, had to be built 100% through student fees.

What would the 100% student fee option mean? A very modest \$20M new building would, by my quick, back of the envelope estimation, cost every full-time Western student another \$150/year every year, for the next 15 years. And, funding for maintenance and operation costs would have to be added on top. I suppose, if the student body voted for such a fee increase, our Trustees would consider it. But, such an electoral result seems unlikely. And unfair given already high tuition and fees.

So, progress requires not getting irrevocably locked into seriously unrealistic options.

Looking around the country at other successful approaches, it appears that ethnic student centers, alone, may not be the best full response to today's and tomorrow's needs.

This fall, I made the same commitment to AS President Seare that I have made to each of her predecessors: "I will never undercut you or student government by going around you; should student groups bring concerns to my attention, I will direct them to AS so that AS may represent them."

So, for example, students of color have invited university leaders to meet and discuss ESC needs. Fair enough. But, we work through AS on matters involving students. Foremost, it is AS that needs to hear from these students concerning the urgency AS should attach to this matter. And then I would hope that these groups would further encourage AS to attend with urgency to being fully involved, attending meetings, and helping move the current planning process forward ASAP.

There are great opportunities here for Western. And, as to the challenges: none are insurmountable so long as we do not falter in our commitments to what is best for Western's students ... do not falter in our commitments to best problem-solving, innovation, and governance practices ... and, do not falter in our commitments to each other.

Sincerely,

Bruce

WHAT HE REALLY SAID...

Dear Western Students,

Fuck your needs, honestly.

Most of the content in this email should be sent exclusively to students and organizations to whom the Ethnic Student Center rebuild concerns. However, I have taken it upon myself to include every last student on this campus on this email chain, because I get paid too much to realize how passive aggressive I'm being.

I know that most students will only read the beginning of this email, so here I will talk about how diverse I want the school to be and how I have been thinking about this before I was justifiably called out by the campus community in order to save face. I have also pulled this stunt during student demonstrations where I show up for a few minutes, make sure I am recognized as being present, and then continue to enforce policies that directly contradict the principles I am pretending to stand for.

The problems that will arise from making a commitment to our students of color are not monetary- that is, the budget will allow it. The problem, as demonstrated by this email, is that I have a lack of respect for my students (and by extension faculty) of color and see *them* as a roadblock to collaboration instead of my white privilege and excess of authority on issues that concern them.

Universities move forward because people of good will listen, learn, problem-solve and, yes, compromise. Unfortunately for this campus, I expect all of the listening and compromising to happen with my students of color and believe that their needs and education are "negotiable demands." Because the students of color on this campus have a backbone, I will call them in this email "irrelevant", because acknowledging their power and courage to confront whiteness on this campus would only give them more power, and I do not think they deserve it. This would cause me to actually do something and I have money to count.

Consider, because for some reason I think you may not have considered, for example, getting irrevocably locked into the position that the future needs for the Ethnic Student Center can only be met by a separate, stand-alone building. There are no vacant or under-utilized buildings at Western. Is, then, a new building a realistic possibility?

I am asking this question because rhetorically it will make students on campus who have read this far believe that there is not a single building on campus that could be utilized and make the student leaders of color look like they have not thought their demands through even though they clearly have, otherwise I would not have been politically forced to respond through this email.

Doing things requires work and I am resigning soon dammit. I don't want to do work. Please don't make me work.

We would have to lobby in Olympia to get state funding for the Ethnic Student Center- or I would have to give up some of my ridiculous salary, but lets not kid ourselves. I won't even keep this pettiness between the people it belongs between.

I will now tell students reading this email that the ESC would require student money so that all of you will help me reject the plans the students of color are bringing to me. I will also go into unnecessary detail about the cost of the building just to remind you how much I don't want to pay for it.

I will now show sympathy for how high tuition is in order to make this email more soft and digestible. I also need to keep some students on my side, and because many do not know the full scope of this bullshit, throwing in this pseudo-sympathetic line will work.

So, progress requires not getting irrevocably locked into seriously unrealistic options. I think meeting the needs and demands of our students of color are unrealistic.

Looking around the country at other successful approaches, it appears that ethnic student centers, alone, may not be the best full response to today's and tomorrow's needs. I will use this as an excuse to continue to dismiss the demands being brought to me by the student body.

This fall, I made the same commitment to AS President Seare that I have made to each of her predecessors: "I will never undercut you or student government by going around you; I will undercut you by sending out mass emails calling the students on campus irrelevant and unrealistic. Should student groups bring concerns to my attention, I will direct them to AS so that AS may represent them."

This is my way of evading responsibility for the isolation of our students of color and therefore distancing myself from the responsibility to take action about it. I would rather put the burden on my students.

There are great opportunities here for Western. And I think I can get away with this email because I am resigning soon and think that students on campus, especially white students, will not hold me accountable for how ridiculous, inappropriate, and to be completely honest, white supremacist in nature this email is.

But I am wrong. The students will no longer stand for this bullshit, and I am not ready.

Sincerely,

Bruce