

WSSU Alumni Protest Chancellor's Decisions

Contributed by Tiffany Gibson -- Black College Wire
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Alumni hold demonstration, join students in "Call to Awareness"

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During Winston-Salem State University's Homecoming on Friday, Oct. 30, approximately 500 alumni, students and staff attended a "Call To Awareness, Action, Accountability" to address their concerns about the decisions made by Chancellor Donald J. Reaves that affect Winston-Salem State and the community.

Victor Bruinton, president of the WSSU National Alumni Association, said he organized the "Call" because Reaves had been unresponsive to him and the Alumni Association. "I requested a meeting [on behalf of the Alumni Association] with Chancellor Reaves and sent a letter of concern before deciding to hold a call to action," Bruinton said.

In the letter [see Grievance Letter] sent Oct. 28, a lawyer from Tharrington Smith LLP outlined some of the alumni's grievances.

Reaves said that he was aware of the event a week in advance.

"I've been in higher education since 1977, and I have been at universities where protests are common. I encourage people to protest that's their right to protest," he said.

"Freedom of speech is one of the most cherished freedoms that we have, and they should speak out if they want to. That is why we have the free speech zone on this campus."

During the "Call" alumni circulated a flier titled "Chancellor Reaves' Report Card: Initial Priorities He set for WSSU."

According to the flier, Reaves failed seven of the eight priorities and was given an incomplete for one.

The alumni gave Reaves a grade of F for the first priority listed: "Improving Retention and Graduation Rates."

During an interview with the student newspaper, The News Argus, Bruinton said that with all the things going on today a student graduating within four years is not always obtainable.

"It is important for the University to keep track of students graduating within four years, but they should really focus on graduation rates for those students who graduate within six years," Bruinton said. "UNC-CH, NC State and NC A&T all put more emphasis on the six-year graduation rate."

"Sometimes classes are only offered in the fall semester, and if you are a student with a spring graduation your graduation date may be changed because of class availability."

Reaves said graduation rates are measures of the percentage of students who graduate from the University within four or six years.

"I have only been here two years," Reaves said. "It's impossible for me to have a class under me that we have begun to measure."

"The first class I admitted was fall 2008. My first four-year graduation rate will be in 2012, and 2014 for six years. I can't be held accountable for the graduation rate."

Reaves said all this is about Division I athletics.

He said people who are unhappy with the decision to move back to Division II protest about the decision, conjure up all sorts of things, and attack the process.

"There was no problem with the Alumni Association before that decision was made," Reaves said.

Bruinton said there is still time for change when it comes to the Division II decision.

“The Division II decision will not be finalized until the committee comes in April,” Bruinton said.

“There is still something that can be done.”

The alumni gave Reaves an F for his ability to increase fundraising.

Reaves said, “Last year in a economic recession our fundraising total was only down I believe four percent, which I believe was the best performance of all the UNC-systems. “It’s interesting they [alumni] would raise the issue of fundraising.”

Reaves continued to explain alumni fundraising for athletics.

“The transition to Division I is in its fifth year,” he said.

“Over that time period the total raised for athletics is \$942,000. Of that total only \$300,000 has come from alumni, which is to say the alumni did not support the athletic program. It’s as simple as that,” he added.

“That’s an average of \$60,000 a year. There are some alumni who are generous and support this University, but if you want this thing so badly you have to step up, and you have to pay for it, and that was not done.”

Bruinton said when the alumni try to implement fundraising initiatives they are met with opposition.

“The school will not release information from the University databases that has the year the alumni graduated, their permanent address, phone numbers and e-mail.

“The University said they see the alumni as competition, which does not make sense when all the money raised is going to the same place,” Bruinton said.

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Tiffany Gibson writes for The News Argus, the Winston-Salem State University student newspaper, which originally published this article.