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news on the digital picketline



DROP THE CHARGES! ABOLISH THE BOARD!

In the topsy-turvy world of the contemporary university, top-level administrators are paid vast sums to enforce order on campuses and maintain the university's S&P rating. From the perspective of our administrators and their budgets and investment portfolios, it is entirely reasonable that perceived threats to this order would be treated as immoral, indecent and ultimately illicit. Those of us who see in the University something beyond its ratings and real estate holdings have naturally a different relation to mechanisms of maintaining order like the student code of conduct, and certainly less respect for them. This fact should not obscure an understanding of the function of those internal processes and protocols that universities utilize to uphold their authority and secure assent from broad layers of faculty and staff.

In the prevailing paradigm of "criminality" in the United States, it is no secret that our legal system routinely targets students of color—that it singles them out, makes them culpable, and punishes accordingly. This is well known, even to our administrators, who strive to avoid reproducing such undignified practices not only in their marketing strategies but by distancing themselves as far as possible from the reaches of the law. This has striking implications at the level of its student conduct enforcement procedures, which should not under any circumstances be confused with legal proceedings.

For the contemporary university to adequately proceed with prosecuting those accused of breaking the ranks of its guidelines and decorum, it must resort to concepts that emphasize community "healing," the renewal of trust, and, above all, accountability processes which take "restorative justice" as their benchmark. Not to be confused with an institution of law enforcement, the contemporary university seeks to couch its rule in conceptual frames originally developed by victims of legal and extra-legal abuse, by progressive reformers, and by moral guardians of an age conscious of its own violence. Indeed, our own UCSC employs its conduct investigations, its summonses, its hearings, and its trials, in accordance with rigorous ethical principles, aspiring not merely to equity, but to "diversity," "inclusion," and "community justice." The university succeeds where the law fails, as it were, and retains a team of high profile lawyers who cannot help but agree.

Yet the "victim" of abuse in this case are apparently the employers and administrators. They were not particularly affronted by the fact of a labor dispute, they claim, but by the profusion of antagonistic micro-interactions which characterize any genuine revolt. The insults, name-calling, and petty derogations predictably leveled at the bosses and public figures, who fail so spectacularly to lead, especially sting our remarkably thin-skinned administrators. They are people too, they're quick to assure us, simultaneously reminding us of our rights to speech and assembly. Indeed, speech in particular, and the peculiar effects forms of combative speech have when uttered by students of color, is at stake here. "Speech" is the lingua franca of the contemporary university which is always committed to modifying its appearance (but never its structure) in accordance with principles of justice. Even Janet Napolitano is a vocal proponent of DACA. University leaders prize the UC's status as a bulwark against racism and state-led violence, proof of which [they cite](#) in the directives issued by its assemblage of diversity offices, committees, and partnerships with an array of social justice nonprofits (and business partners).

It is curious, therefore, that graduate workers of color, first generation students, and undocumented students are being targeted and hit with the harshest penalties for participation in the wildcat strike. Given their carefully constructed community guidelines and ethical stances, it seems odd that university administrators would work directly with state and local police to indict these students for

conduct infractions, rather than breaches of law, even where those charges clearly presume a breach of law ("resisting arrest", etc). What does it mean that, as part of the structure of this restorative justice process, the accused students are now being asked to research and report on their relationship to the First Amendment and engage in "healing" sessions with police officers? On the face of it this university-initiated melange of legal and quasi-legal institutional arrangements would seem to suggest a deeper affinity with the most overtly carceral aspects of the justice system.

What needs to be clarified, however, is their peculiar mobilization of anti-discrimination frameworks to further entrench processes of discriminatory treatment, punishment, and retribution. The distribution of culpability through restorative justice frameworks asserts that those accused have ultimately victimized themselves through their misguided conduct. In a common racist trope, the perpetrators are not authors of their own actions but duped by others or by impulse; their raucous behavior and character is deemed unbecoming of an institution of higher learning. This punitive script finds a more immediate corollary in the 2014-15 sequence of student actions around proposed fee and tuition hikes at UCSC. In that wave of building occupations and blockades, the administration asserted that these mobilizations against a policy of austerity with effects institution-wide were led exclusively by white students – [a claim clearly rebuked by the integral participation of militant students of color](#). Enlisting the familiar narrative of its commitment to providing "safe-spaces" to marginalized students, the university effectively undercut the opposition when it sent in police to restore racial harmony on campus. In both instances, the real grievances of students are elided in favor of an administrative discourse that acknowledges historical injustice only to assimilate it into its mode of class rule, which, in the United States has always operated in close proximity to white supremacy.

It would seem, then, that the legacies of struggles against discrimination in all of its forms are evacuated of their content and rendered as a kind of window dressing in the contemporary university. But this would neglect the fact that the student conduct protocols operate through these very terms of "anti-racist" discourse, that the university redeploys anti-discrimination tactics to implement the kind of "diversity" it advertises, and that the violation of the university's norms is tantamount to upholding an anachronistic and exclusionary (not to mention ungrateful) form of unsanctioned speech and assembly. The university here presents itself not only as the innocent and aggrieved victim of these actions, but also as the neutral arbiter of their resolution. In respect to this neutrality, the "victims" of the recent student conduct violations--our Chancellor and EVC--claim complete independence from the entire process. This despite the [code of conduct](#) itself articulating, in article 104.20, that "the final authority for administration of student discipline rests with the Chancellor"! If the Chancellor is indeed "sad" to know students won't be returning because they have been suspended for multiple years, or that others are being dragged through conduct hearings for their "demeanor" and their clothing, she would do well to remember that she is the final authority on those who question her authority.

The conduct summons reveal these processes for what they are: merely the latest cynical technique of the university administration's counterinsurgency. Racism has always been a tool of the bosses, and in the contemporary university it must not go unchallenged under the banner of its opposition.

We oppose the racist student conduct process!

DROP THE CHARGES FOR ALL STUDENTS!

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