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Failure of Protected Learning Spaces at WSSU

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been identified as one of the institutions that “sustain Black life.” These are sacred spaces for the Black community; spaces that were designed to protect Black life, nurture Black genius, and instill a strong sense of identity, self-confidence, and the capacity to thrive in a world that has marginalized Black people.

The incident that occurred on the campus of Winston-Salem State University yesterday (12/14/22) was profane. It was profane because it constituted an assault on the sacred space that Black schools are supposed to provide. It was profane because - by all accounts - the involvement of law enforcement, the arrest of the Black female student, the decision to detain her, and the disorderly conduct charges filed against her were a disproportionate response to a passionate disagreement over a class assignment. It was profane because it shattered the shelter that is supposed to surround the space and place of the Historically Black College and University. Action4Equity actively works against oppressive policies and practices in our local schools that perpetuate the school-to-prison pipeline and upholds damaging exclusionary discipline; we demand that education at all levels confront systemic violence that continues to marginalize and harm our Black students.

The incident that occurred yesterday reflected a catastrophic failure in pedagogy. We question the cultural competence of a professor who will resort to involving campus security/law enforcement as a means of resolving a conflict with a student. We support those educators and professors who have an understanding of human development and the learning needs of young adults. We are clear that they are **students first**. WSSU has the responsibility of developing young minds, creating and sustaining an environment that fosters intellectual and academic freedom. We expect that an HBCU will hire faculty and staff who understand the positive influences of culture on learning, affirm those influences, and amplify students' voices via shaping and directing their outspokenness. Therefore, this incident causes us to question not only the cultural competence of the professor, but her overall competence as an instructor. This incident demonstrates a lack of basic and cultural competence as well as a gap in understanding the emotional intelligence of young adults.

College can be a very challenging time in the life of young adults, moreso for Black students, many of whom remain among first time college attendees. The familial and community expectations for their success is high. Professors at HBCUs understand and nurture these expectations, and are able to navigate the emotional dynamics of students during this time of their lives. Competent instructors are able to



negotiate differences of opinion, provide clarity for misunderstandings and stand above ego driven-responses and hysterical reactions to students who may be challenging. Fully competent classroom leaders welcome challenges because that is where the greatest opportunities for learning exist. Additionally, fully competent professors meet students where they are, and seek to learn from them. **The professor, as well as the university, need to make restitution to this student for the emotional trauma she experienced as a result of being arrested.**

We find this professor's actions completely unacceptable and WSSU's reply to be wanting relative to this whole egregious incident. We support the demand for an apology to the student from the university and the professor. As current students and alumni of WSSU organize to demand answers and demand justice, we will stand with them; as the actions of everyone involved - from the professor to the police to the administration - are scrutinized, we bring our lens, as well. Our commitment to foster **A Community Culture Where Equity In Education Proudly Prevails** applies not only to K-12 spaces, but to institutions of higher learning, too. We stand in solidarity with all sectors of our community; and we always will.

Action4Equity is a black-led, intentionally multi-racial coalition of educators, parents, students, faith leaders, and community members building a movement to advance equity for students in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools in the areas of academic achievement, access to high-quality instruction, and safe and healthy school environments. www.action4equityws.org

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