

November 2, 2015

Dear University of Missouri Curators,

You may or may not know me, but my name is Jonathan Butler and I am currently a graduate student here at the University of Missouri. As a concerned student and a economically, socially, and emotionally committed individual within in the University of Missouri 'family' I believe it is my duty to make you aware of the actions of one of your employees, Tim Wolfe.

Since Mr. Wolfe joined the UM system as president in 2012, there have been a slew of racist, sexist, homophobic, etc., incidents that have dynamically disrupted the learning experience for marginalized/underrepresented students at the University of Missouri. In the past 90 days alone we have seen the MSA President Payton Head being called the n-word on campus, graduate students being robbed of their health insurance, Planned Parenthood services being stripped from campus, #ConcernedStudent1950 peaceful demonstrators being threatened with pepper spray, and a matter of days ago a vile and disgusting act of hatred where a MU student drew a swastika in the Gateway residential hall with their own feces.

Although these incidents individually are not his fault as a collection of incidents at the university they are his responsibility to address. According to his job description on the UM system website the president is to, "Create a positive learning environment that enables students to achieve their full academic potential". In situations like the #ConcernedStudent1950 demonstration, the incident with MSA President Payton Head, loss of graduate insurance, and the list goes on, students are not able to achieve their full academic potential because of the inequalities and obstacles they face. In each of these scenarios, Mr. Wolfe had ample opportunity to create policies and reform that could shift the culture of Mizzou in a positive direction but in each scenario he failed to do so. It is unreasonable to believe these systemic issues can be solved over night but it is not unreasonable to hold Tim Wolfe and other UM system officials accountable for the role they play in matter the University of Missouri system a safe and inclusive place. According to the recap from a meeting #ConcernedStudent1950 demonstrators recently had with Mr. Wolfe he has failed to address issues of racism, sexism, bigotry, homophobia, etc., at Mizzou because he is "not completely" aware of these issues. A world where a university president in charge of thousands of personnel, millions of dollars, and countless moving pieces and can still afford the luxury of being "not completely" aware of the environment they function in is a scary place to be. This form of negligence to student concerns is not only a direct violation of the ascribed duties for the office of UM system president but also not befitting of a leader over a higher education institute. Even looking at the scholarly articles on university presidents there is a reoccurring theme of effective presidents being those who are fully competent in all facets of their campuses and take care to address all concerns of their constituents (Fisher & Koch, 1996; Fisher, 1984; Birnbaum, 1986).

The revolting acts that are occurring at Mizzou are a result of a poisonous infestation of apathy that has been spawning from University of Missouri system leadership. For some that may seem like a flamboyant statement but when you sit back and reflect on the fact that a MU student felt *comfortable enough* with the campus culture to use their own feces to draw a swastika on campus, that really tells you about the direction in which the University of Missouri is headed. The gap in effective, genuine, and compassionate campus leadership has caused hatred, bigotry, and racism to become normalized

behaviors in our community rather than the pillars of respect, responsibility, discovery, and excellence, which we hold in high esteem. Of course there is the aspect of the UM system presidency that involves maintaining the financial stability of the UM system and managing his operational personnel (such as Chancellor Loftin) but that does not make him exempt from his core duty of providing a safe space of learning for all students. Mizzou's deteriorating culture is like a gaping and infected wound that can only be cured by scraping out the dead and decaying flesh and starting anew with a flushing of the skin and application of proper antibiotics to begin the healing process. In this scenario, Tim Wolfe is the decaying flesh and the longer he stays in leadership of the UM system the worse the campus climate will become not only at the University of Missouri but also on all UM system campuses.

Let it be known I have no ill will or thoughts of harm towards Mr. Wolfe but I do have an urgency to make the campus I call home a more safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment for all identities and backgrounds. I am a firm believer that attending to the needs of marginalized/underrepresented students is worth the time, attention, and care of administration; our lived experiences are worth acknowledging and our humanity worth fighting for. Starting today November 2, 2015 at 9:00 a.m. I will be embarking on an indefinite hunger strike in opposition to having Tim Wolfe as the University of Missouri system president. During this hunger strike, I will not consume any food or nutritional sustenance at the expense of my health until either Tim Wolfe is removed from office or my internal organs fail and my life is lost. Being of sound mind and heart, I have committed myself fully to this endeavor because I believe that the University of Missouri system and all of its constituents deserve a leader who is competent enough to perform at all levels of the position including administrative, political, financial, and emotional.

One of my favorite civil rights activists, Maya Angelou, once said, "I agreed a long time ago, I would not live at any cost. If I am moved or forced away from what I think is the right thing. I will not do it." What I believe is the right thing at this moment in time is for the UM system to begin a new chapter in its history books by removing Tim Wolfe and appointing a new UM system president. So as the collective body of UM curators considers my request and decides on what your next steps will be do not consider that my life is in your hands because my life is in God's hands. What you should consider is what your legacy will be after this point, a legacy of progress and inclusion or a legacy of hatred, racism, and bigotry. My hope is that you will choose the former and not the latter.

Sincerely,

A Black man who believes in freedom.

Jonathan L. Butler

#TheStruggleContinues