Navigating the Political Poles

Including All Points of View in Our Work

Victor K. Wilson
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"You’re biased against conservative students"

"You’re coddling these snowflakes"

"It’s not a safe climate for conservative students to speak out"

"Why don’t you have equal funding for conservative student groups?"

"You’re indoctrinating students with your liberal ideology"

"You’re using the state’s money to fund all of these ‘social justice’ programs"

"You should do more to protect all students"

"Why don’t you speak out more?"

"You’re complicit in the status quo"

"You’re all talk, no action"

"Follow the money. It’s all about not upsetting certain people"

"All you care about is reputation"

"You’re part of the problem"

We’ve heard it all
What can we do differently?

Key External Stakeholders

Our Staff

Students
Think of a specific circumstance that happened on your campus that fits this conversation
Think | Pair | Share
(Groups of 3-4 or so)

Think of a specific circumstance that happened on your campus that fits this conversation

• What did external stakeholders have to say?
• How might you have better shaped the conversation?
Suggested guidance for external stakeholders

Rally your partners on campus

- Use government relations, development, alumni, admissions, marketing, senior administration, and others to move the conversation along with us
- Connect with others to create allies ahead of time
Do the talking points now

- We tend to wait on flashpoints
- Gets everyone’s view on the table
- Builds focus and moves toward consensus
- Might need updating but have this ready at all times
Other suggestions to shape conversations with external stakeholders?
Said a mid-level staff member...

"The university incubates what is happening in society at this very moment. Many decisions are made to maintain the school’s rankings and make donors and legislators happy and do not allow the ability to challenge or be critical of the system. You can’t be for students and not be for staff as well. Administrators should not ask staff, especially those who work most closely with students and do social justice work, to compromise our integrity for politics."
How Do You Respond?

"The university incubates what is happening in society at this very moment. Many decisions are made to maintain the school’s rankings and make donors and legislators happy and do not allow the ability to challenge or be critical of the system. You can’t be for students and not be for staff as well. Administrators should not ask staff, especially those who work most closely with students and do social justice work, to compromise our integrity for politics."
Suggested guidance for staff

Have the hard conversation up front

• Acknowledge any conflicting values (personal vs. professional)

• Focus on what we’re ‘for’ (even when it hurts)

• Challenge them to serve all students

• Make it clear from the start how matters might be handled
Find more ways to show value

- Want to be included in decision-making
- Cross-train into diverse areas
- Acknowledge the generational and perspective gaps
Other suggestions to help staff better understand the impact of politics?
We can all think of a student flashpoint
Almost waiting on it to happen every day
I’ll prove it:

_____1____ (student group) invites _____2_____ (speaker) to talk about _____3____ (issue) during _____4____ (time of year), and the _____5____ (external stakeholder) calls the _____6____ (university leader) to “learn more.”
Reach out to key students and groups

- Before there is an immediate need
- Decide who or which office is best for the given relationship
- Allows a conversation with lower stakes
Create your own dialogue and invite them in

• Again, the areas for debate are not surprising

• Make lower stakes dialogue on those issues regularly available – in ways you can help shape
Suggested guidance for students

Review your messages to students, including policies and practices

- Use different political lenses
- Ensure internal consistency between policies
- Search for “leftovers” (old versions, anything that’s out there)
- Clear and concise will be most helpful with students
Become comfortable with turbulence

• Will continue to get hit from all sides
• Know what you’re prioritizing
• Realize “we got this” – especially if we’ve done the prep work
• Accept that ‘this too will pass’
Takeaways and Discussion