Campus Activism: This Week’s Racist Incidents and Dr. Ford's Testimony

It feels weird to write a blog this week on campus activism that is not related to the two racist incidents that happened on campus, so I would like to touch on what happened and what is being done.

The racist incidents, which I am sure most students have heard about already, occurred on this campus. In the first, an anonymous tip was reported to the UMass police about an “agitated black male,” when the person being referred to was actually an employee walking to work. In the second incident, “hang Melville n*****” was written in a Melville residence hall bathroom.

I want to highlight what students are doing about these two horrifying events and let the courageous activism of my peers speak for itself. I also want to encourage students looking to apply to UMass that you will find peers that will take up action against racism — anytime, anyplace. These incidents are not unique to this school. But it is up to this administration and the students here to demonstrate the character of our university in its response. I am increasingly humbled by the strength of my peers in facing these events that make them feel unsafe and attacked on this campus.

Today (September 27) there was a student-organized walkout, and tonight there will be a community forum held to talk about these events and appropriate responses and demands from students. Next week there will be a Teach-In held by the Afro-American Studies Department and the Du Bois Center.

There was a planned student rally for Friday, which I believe will be postponed due to weather.

As this happens, I hope that students continue to talk about what is happening and how these are not isolated, unreplicated incidents. Many students have their own
stories along these lines, and I have been honored that my friends have chosen to share some of them with me. It is our obligation to take each seriously and respond appropriately.

I also want to talk about the ongoing Kavanaugh hearing, which I am listening to right now as I write this and as Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testifies live.

"One in 3 women, and 1 in 6 men experience sexual violence. Sixty percent of violence goes unreported," Senator Dianne Feinstein said as she interviewed Dr. Ford.

Dr. Ford’s testimony was raw, intense, and powerful. I encourage anyone to watch it.

It reminds us how often this happens, and how often it happens while survivors are in school. Dr. Ford was in high school when this assault happened, and her story echoes so many I have heard that it is haunting. One of the consequences she talks about is the impact that the assault had on her time in school, and that even though it happened in high school, it heavily impacted her time in college: impacting her schoolwork, her friendships with men, her mental health, and her ability overall to thrive in college.

UMass Amherst has resources for survivors. The UMPD lists them here. Among which are the Center for Women & Community Rape Crisis Services. Llámanos is a Spanish speaking hotline, the number is 1-800-223-5001. Victim Rights Law Center and the New England Learning Center for Women in Transition both provide services (among which legal services) to survivors. RAINN (Rape Abuse & Incest National Network) National Sexual Assault Hotline is also available and it connects callers to local hotlines.

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