

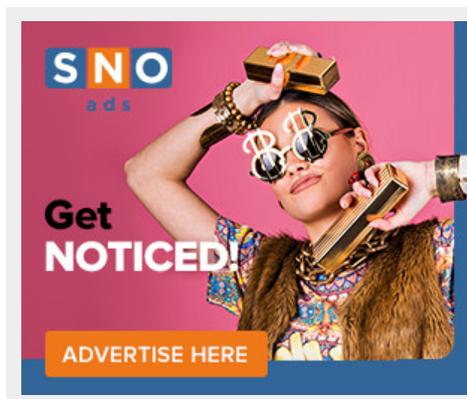
A letter to the administration

Bree Gray, News Editor | January 29, 2021



To the administration,

When asked why there appears to be an “us versus them” mentality at this institution, the answer is very clear to me, but not to you so I wrote down a few reasons in this letter.



There is a very distinct divide between our students and our administration — between us and you. Last year posed a series of trials and tribulations that wore down an already strained relationship between the student body and the administration. We saw problems with President Hilary Link’s administration exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the turbulent national climate. From the lack of transparency, blatant ignorance, and apathetic facial expressions, the Allegheny College community saw it all. We also saw the dedication of our faculty and staff to our students, the success of the Allegheny College Health Agency and the hard work that went into ensuring that our students could remain on campus for the fall semester. It goes without saying that while last semester had its positives, the negatives appeared to far outweigh any positive aspect of last year because they unveiled fundamental flaws in our infrastructure.

The administration has been inaccessible and has lacked transparency since March of 2020. From the last-minute decision to stay remote during the first few days of spring break despite several weeks of optimism to the decision to pack student belongings without their consultation, the strain on the student and administration relationship was deepened. Months of uncertainty over the conclusion of the spring semester and summer bred hostility, frustration and division. Subpar and last-minute communications only strained this relationship more. Students left without answers in an already uncertain future grew even more frustrated when the administration could not adequately address their concerns or offer conclusive information regarding the fall semester. This may have been due to the evolving nature of the pandemic, but in a time of need, our administration disappeared. We needed a strong administration presence, especially when everything else around us was appearing to fall apart or change. We needed some sense of unity and normalcy. If you were just as lost as we were, then that is fine, but be honest and present with us. Vulnerability goes a long way in establishing trust. Where did you go? Why were you silent for so long? It was not until I

reached out that our community got answers.

When BlackNCAC rose to prominence over the summer and our community demanded answers, where were you? While other institutions responded to the claims — or even simply acknowledged the community — what were you doing? You cannot ignore your student body and allow horrid accounts of racial prejudice and discrimination to go unaccounted for. It breaks trust. If you could not respond to Instagram allegations due to existing policies, make that known because it was not until I reached out that our community got answers.

The administration reopened the campus with strict regulations to protect our community but failed to be empathetic, accessible and transparent. Wear a facial covering, wash your hands and maintain physical distancing — not a problem. Avoid social gatherings, going out to purchase necessities and uphold the community to the Gator Pledge — these created problems. The administration was so caught up in the biological and pathological realities of the pandemic that they failed to recognize its social and psychological realities.

Managing COVID-19 appeared to be the priority, not the students — a mistake. Grades suffered, students sought more counseling on campus and many students felt alone, isolated and scared. Why were students penalized during a pandemic that was exhausting academically, socially and mentally?

Prioritizing campus aesthetics and policies over ensuring the mental health of our Black students and providing a space for them on campus following a summer that unveiled institutionalized racism even at Allegheny College — a mistake. Our students needed a space to grieve; our students deserved the right to grieve collectively without fear of retaliation from the administration. These are real-world realities that will not go away for our Black community. How hard is it to allow them the right to peaceful assembly and to provide additional support in a time of need? How necessary was the email after the Breonna Taylor Vigil? What did you hope to accomplish?

Student lobbying efforts, petition signings and cries for help were ignored or met with defensive responses — a mistake. If you are defensive, it means that there is something wrong and it needs to be addressed. Be vulnerable and honest with yourself, your fellow administrators and most importantly, your students. Without the students, what is left for Allegheny College?

I led the General Assembly that had almost 200 live participants and over 400 social media viewers. Our students showed up in unprecedented numbers because they felt like this was the only way that they could reach the administration. They were angry, hurt and upset. I rewatched that General Assembly at least three times and I could feel the animosity from the students and the defensive nature of Link's remarks. It was during these moments of reflection that it became clear to me why there currently appears to be an "us versus them" mentality. Were there areas where we could have expressed these concerns better? That is a subjective question that warrants conversation, but what we saw with certainty that evening was raw emotion. Our students needed an empathetic president at that time — arguably more than they did at any other point that semester. This does not discredit the work that Link has

gone since she has taken office or her feelings as a human being, but it highlights what the students needed to see from our executive leadership at that time. After months of being in the dark, our students saw an opportunity to get information and express their grievances which had previously fallen upon deaf ears and they were met with disappointment and frustration once again.

Do you see now?

Let's talk about what went right during the fall semester. The institution followed through on its promise to find a way to reopen the campus for students interested in returning while other institutions remained fully remote. The institution followed through on creating an elaborate COVID-19 response operations team while other institutions had high infection rates. The institution followed through on ensuring that students could remain on campus for the duration of the semester while other institutions shut down daily.

Campus-wide food trucks? Continue them. Campus-wide activities? Expand them. Campus-wide communications? Improve them.

The “us versus them” mentality could have been avoided. There is still hope, but you must mend strained relationships and follow up on the institution's promise to “do better”. If you want a better relationship within the student community, start acting like it and make it known. It cannot be done by just one part of the administration — start with executive leadership and keep going.

Also, winter hats are not bandaids that will fix wounds that have not healed.

This three-week semester has been hard on everyone, including students, faculty and yourself. Acknowledge it, publically. The conversations that you have behind closed doors cannot be heard by the majority of the community. Acknowledge student struggles like you did the Capitol Hill Riots. Do not stop at merely acknowledging! Provide resources to help our community succeed and be empathetic, honest and proactive in building the relationship that you seek.

If you want to be present with us, you must show us.

There will be a lot of raw emotion so be prepared to handle that with compassion and action. Be prepared to control your body language because we notice — no more folded arms, blank stares or apathetic facial expressions. Most importantly be prepared to adjust your tone and attitude in every meeting about student concerns because it will always be “us versus them” if it does not feel like “we”.

This was written by the very person that covered every controversial topic that occurred in 2020 — do not take that lightly. I have met with many students and I have heard multiple perspectives about the administration. I am extending to you the knowledge and perspective of a student and a trusted reporter, so I would suggest that you take this insight into serious consideration moving forward.

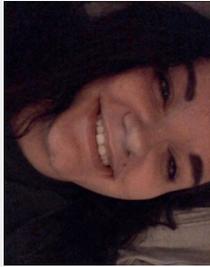
In absentia Lucie Tenobres Vincent

in absentia lucis, tenebrae vincunt.

Bree M. Gray

News Editor, *The Campus*

About the Writer



Bree Gray, News Editor

Bree Gray is a sophomore from Washington, Pennsylvania. She is a Global Health Studies major with an Economics minor. This is her first year on staff,...

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This foul year of two thousand and twenty. This year could be the start of a fantastic

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