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ATTORNEY GENERAL

October 16, 1974

Dr. Thomas E. Richardson
Vice President for Student
and Administrative Services
University of Idaho
Moscow, Idaho 83843

Dear Tom:

Please excuse my delay in replying to the agreed follow-up after our September 25 meeting concerning the issues raised last spring by the Black Student Union.

In his communique of April 22, 1974, Dr. Hartung responded to earlier demands presented by the BSU. The issues which our committee was asked to consider at the meeting on May 6, 1974, as I understood them, were basically as follows:

1. inequitable distribution of financial aid to minority students;

2. lack of adequate student advisory services for minority students and particularly Black students;

3. alleged discriminatory hiring practices by the administration;

4. student representation in the selection process of the recruitment and hiring of a coordinator of minority student programs.

These points were discussed with the Black Student Union representatives on September 25 and the results of that meeting are as follows.

First, the concerns of minority and disadvantaged students regarding the ratio of grants and other gift aid to that of loans

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is natural and completely understandable. As a former student financial aid officer, it is a problem with which I am intimately familiar. Our inquiry did not carefully or systematically examine the actual practices of the University's financial aid office, but the cursory examination of the aid awarded Black and other minority students did not indicate any discriminatory practices. Within the last few months, the federal government conducted an audit of the financial aid office and, according to acceptable audit procedures, found nothing remiss in the handling of federal funds by that office. Admittedly, a financial audit would probably not detect discriminatory practices by financial aid personnel but their annual certification on the application for federal funds would certainly indicate any questionable practices. If that were the case, it may be assumed that the U.S. Office of Education would then conduct an investigation.

One cogent point should be kept in mind by student recipients of financial aid. Regrettably, the ratio of federal loans to grants at the University of Idaho is extremely disproportionate, particularly when compared to the amounts available in the same programs at other institutions of higher education. This fact may have given rise to student sentiment of inequality in aid distribution.

Another problem frequently occuring in connection with financial aid awards is the lack of understanding on the part of students in the type of aid available and granted. This is a difficult problem to overcome, especially when most financial aid offices are under-staffed. The coordinator of minority student programs may be able to assist with this problem through student counselors he may hire. Also, it could be possible for the financial aid office itself to employ minority graduate students or mature under graduates, through the College Work Study Program or by some other method, to act as financial aid counselors to minority students.

The second point raised by the BSU concerning adequate student advisory services for minority students seems to me to be on the threshold of being resolved. The University, in my judgment, is to be commended on hiring Mr. Charles Ramsey as coordinator of minority student programs. Mr. Ramsey has good insight concerning the difficulties of his position and the needs of both the students and the institution. He will not

compromise himself in representation of one minority group over another but will instead seek to establish an office which will be viable among all student groups. I am sure that he will take the appropriate steps to provide the desired student advisory services within the bounds of his limited financial resources.

Point number three regarding alleged discriminatory hiring practices by the University of Idaho has satisfactorily been answered by the signing of the conciliation agreement by the Regents with the Idaho Human Rights Commission and the Women's Caucus. Without admitting any violation of the law, the University has reaffirmed its intention to comply with state and federal requirements in non-discriminatory hiring practices. An affirmative action officer will monitor the University's actions and assure compliance with all appropriate statutes and regulations. The students should be made aware of the fact that the University has entirely too much at stake to risk non-compliance with federal and state law.

Finally, the BSU representatives requested student participation in the selection process of the coordinator of minority student programs. It is my understanding that during the summer three students participated in all phases of the recruitment and hiring of this individual. In my judgment, the University acted wisely in granting this request of the students.

Certainly, the Black Student Union did not receive everything they were demanding earlier this year. Their actions, however, resulted in a dialog between the administration and the students and opened much needed channels of communication. The students had legitimate concerns in my estimation and I think the University has made a sincere effort to respond to those concerns.

It was a pleasure for me to be involved in this matter, Tom. I hope that if our office can be of any assistance in the future, you will feel free to call on us.

Very truly yours,

FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

DAVID C. BLACKWELL
Administrative Assistant

DCB:lm

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