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2023-01-25 Are Schools in the Pacific Northwest Investing in the Safety of Their Students?

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Editorial: Seattle University Should Practice What it Preaches

The Spectator Editorial Board

In the past three months, The Spectator has published two feature articles in which anonymous sources accused a Seattle University employee of mistreatment. In one case, the university did not respond. In the other case, the university issued a stern defense of the accused individual. One of these accused individuals is a Black woman. The other is a white man. It isn't difficult to guess which one Seattle U rushed to defend.

On the night of Nov. 30, 2022, The Spectator published an article detailing serious allegations made by three anonymous students against a volleyball coach who has spent several seasons at Seattle U.

It was a tense night. Whenever The Spectator publishes accusations of students against members of university faculty or staff, the editorial board takes extra care to ensure that we thoroughly invite all parties to share their perspectives and that allegations are understood as just that—allegations—by one group against another individual.

After the paper was distributed and readers started visiting the article, we searched through our inboxes for a response. We assumed that a member of Seattle U Athletics would want to offer further comment or a defense of the coach who was accused by the anonymous students. After weeks went by, we received no emails about the article. It was surprising that no one from the university thought it necessary to provide input.

On the night of Jan. 18, 2023, The Spectator published an article detailing serious allegations made by three anonymous students against a law professor who has taught for one semester at Seattle U.

The next day, the Dean of the Law School Anthony Varona demanded an urgent meeting with The Spectator, and we received an email from Scott K. McClellan, the vice president for university affairs. Since then, Editor-in-Chief Andru Zodrow has sat down with the dean of the law school, along with the vice dean and the law school's director of marketing. Throughout these email chains and conversations, we've watched three men representing the law school scold The Spectator's Faculty Advisor and Associate Dean Sonora Jha, a tenured professor of communications and media and the only woman in these meetings and email chains, about how she should have directed The Spectator to behave.

The question we have been asking ourselves is what is the difference between these two stories? Both the volleyball feature and the law school feature concerned an employee of Seattle U being accused by three anonymous sources of mistreating their students. Why did Seattle U spend so much time responding to the allegations made against one individual rather than the other?

One distinction between these two individuals is that the law professor is a white man, whereas the volleyball coach is a Black woman.

It's deeply saddening to watch a Jesuit university which purports to uphold the values of inclusion, social justice and institutional change so quickly act as any other university would in protecting an accused professor. Unfortunately, this is a broader trend at Catholic universities. Christ walked with the excluded and marginalized, and called upon all people of good will to do the same. In this case, Seattle U has opted to refuse that invitation. The systemic disempowerment of women of color in favor of white and male members of this university is frustrating but not particularly surprising.

We sincerely pray that our university examines the reasons it is so quick to defend employees who do not hold marginalized identities, but do not deem issuing any defense of Black and female staff members necessary. As it currently stands, it does not seem that our administrators are particularly interested in that soul-searching. The Spectator mourns for the students, staff and faculty. They deserve better.

The Spectator will continue to serve as a forum for students to share their perspectives, particularly people of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community. We will continue to follow Catholic teaching by standing with the marginalized and excluded.