
Leading Responsibly, Engaging Actively

Last year an issue of *The Atlantic* featured an article titled “The Renaissance of Student Activism.” It attributed the rise of activism during the past couple of years to a number of conditions including growing inequality in educational opportunity, bigotry among students and faculty, protests against sexual assault and, on some campuses, institution-specific grievances. And the writer posits “school officials are . . . less sympathetic now than in the past.” Whether “sympathetic” is the right description regarding the attitude of AASCU campus presidents, certainly smarter is appropriate.

In his cover story “Engaging Learning Through Student Activism,” writer Stephen Pelletier features a number of AASCU presidents and other leaders who participated in an AASCU webinar held earlier this year that focused on “Campus Demonstrations: Empowering Student and Community Voices in a Respectful, Safe Environment.” It is clear none of these leaders exemplify the president who sits in his car while being driven through a student protest.

Pelletier quotes Jonathan Alger, president of James Madison University (Va.), as saying that leaders need to guard against becoming too isolated from the variety of constituents they serve, and should seek ways to “see new or different perspectives, and to think about your own blind spots.”

William J. Lowe, chancellor of Indiana University Northwest, told webinar attendees. “I think that we always ought to demonstrate a preference for encouraging and protecting expression. It is a posture that aligns with our traditions and academic responsibilities, as well as our social purpose.”

One of the core attributes promoted in AASCU’s **Opportunities for All** campaign is responsibilities. This is the space our members occupy in the world of higher

education and their response to student activism is clearly in character. The webinar noted above can be found on aascu.org.

I want to call your attention to two articles in *Currents and Transitions*. Readers will find a list of the 2016 recipients of AASCU’s Excellence and Innovation Awards on page 24. As AASCU President Muriel Howard states, “The programs for which these universities are being honored will inspire not only their AASCU colleagues, but all of higher education.” A video featuring the honorees and their programs is available for viewing at aascu.org. An announcement regarding the availability of a new report on *Competencies for State College and University Presidents* is on page 27. AASCU is particularly interested in helping current and future leaders in higher education develop and refine the skills needed to be effective and better serve students. This report is a valuable resource; a free copy can be downloaded from aascu.org.

Correction: In the summer issue of *Public Purpose* there was an error in the article “In the Wake of Tragedy: The Critical Role of AASCU Campuses.” It was incorrectly reported that the individual identified as the shooter in the mass killings inside Orlando’s gay nightclub, Pulse, once attended the University of Central Florida. He never attended UCF and has no association with the university. *Public Purpose* regrets the error.

