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Smeaton calls removal of flag a mistake

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Vice Provost of Student Affairs John Smeaton released a formal, public apology Saturday for ordering the removal of an American flag from a Lehigh bus and offending students who were anxious to show their patriotism.

Smeaton asked that the flag be removed Thursday around 3:30 p.m. Complaints from students and staff began almost immediately, and the flag was replaced within an hour.

Removing the flag was an effort on Smeaton's part to prevent offending the diverse international population at Lehigh.

Samara Fisher, '03, saw the good in Smeaton's initial reaction but was glad when he apologized and replaced the flag.

"I understand they were trying to be sensitive, but it was unfair to those trying to show their unity in this time of tragedy," Fisher said.

Smeaton made the following apology statement for his actions: "Last Thursday afternoon I made a mistake. It is one that I deeply regret and for which I can only apologize."

Smeaton was sincere concerning his apology.

"In my role I'm often in the situation of telling students to take responsibility for their actions, and I can't in good conscience tell them that if I don't apply it to myself," Smeaton said.

President Farrington also issued a statement regarding this incident, which was sent via a campus-wide e-mail and was also posted on the Lehigh Web site.

Farrington said, "Vice Provost Smeaton regrets his actions and has publicly apologized for them. I believe John is an outstanding vice provost for student affairs and his forthright apology confirms my feelings about him and his personal integrity."

The Morning Call reported the incident Friday, claiming the bus driver and at least one student were extremely angered by the order to remove the flag, and complaints were called in.

Smeaton told The Morning Call, "This was a misunderstanding that was quickly rectified. The message was supposed to be that we are sensitive to everyone."

The flags are once again waving on Lehigh's buses and throughout campus.



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