



IUPUI chancellor: Race-based incident is 'closed'

By Kaitlin Shawgo | IDS | July 23, 2008

His name has been cleared with the University, but Keith J. Sampson is still unsure of how to proceed after being accused of racially harassing coworkers last fall. Sampson, an IU-Purdue University at Indianapolis student and employee, received a letter July 11 from IUPUI Chancellor Charles Bantz apologizing for a letter Sampson received in November from former IUPUI Affirmative Action Officer Lillian Charleston. In the letter, Charleston said reading an anti-Klan book in front of black co-workers after they asked him to stop “demonstrated disdain and insensitivity” on Sampson’s part. In a second letter Charleston sent to Sampson in February, she said because the Affirmative Action Office couldn’t “draw any final conclusion,” no disciplinary action would be taken.

The book that spurred the controversy was Todd Tucker’s “Notre Dame Vs. the Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan.” The book depicts a violent fight in 1924 between the KKK and University of Notre Dame students. Although the harassment claim has been dropped, Sampson said the incident will follow him around in both his professional and personal life.

In his letter July 11, Bantz said the letter from the Affirmative Action Office was misleading, and that it wasn’t inappropriate simply to read the book on campus. “Since no adverse disciplinary action was taken and no information regarding the investigation was placed in your personnel file, we, therefore, consider this matter closed,” Bantz said in the letter.

In the letter, Bantz also noted that a recent column in the Wall Street Journal made him realize he’d apologized to the Indiana Civil Liberties Union and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, who argued on behalf of Sampson. But he hadn’t apologized to Sampson himself.

Tucker said he sent a letter and a copy of the book to Bantz. He added that he’s received support in the situation from many right-wing activists.

“People use this to trash affirmative action ... I’m uncomfortable with that,” he said. Bantz also sent a letter to three other people involved – the woman who filed the complaint and two other employees interviewed for the investigation, said Director of IUPUI Media Relations Rich Schneider.

“In all of the letters, he expressed regret for the situation,” he said. “He said he believed the situation should and could have been handled differently.”

Charleston recently retired, Schneider said, and her replacement started July 1. Schneider said with the new appointment, changes to procedures and policies within IUPUI’s Affirmative Action Office will naturally be made.

If an incident like Sampson’s escalated to campus-wide awareness, Director of the Office for Diversity Education Eric Love said it would be ideal to first resolve the situation between the parties quietly. Along with the Affirmative Action Office, the Office for Diversity Education’s Racial Incidents Team would step in.

“They would pursue the matter, investigate and interview all parties involved,” he said.

If the situation began to garner attention on campus, Love said the IU Commission for Multicultural Understanding’s “Teachable Moments” committee would turn it into an educational opportunity.

Former Black Student Union President Markisha Bates said she was surprised she didn’t hear about the incident earlier in the year but said a forum should be held in order to get the full story.

Sampson said he accepts Bantz’s apology letter and plans to send him a thank-you

note, he said in an e-mail. Other than that, he said he's not sure what to do. He wanted to go for his master's degree, but is now unsure whether he wants to stay at IUPUI. The issue of trying to find a job is also daunting, he said. "Who would want to hire someone who had this controversy?" he said.

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