
SDS charged with Student Conduct Code Violation

by Dr. Marc Becker

The Truman State University chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) has been charged with violating the student conduct code. SDS is a radical, multi-issue, student-led organization that fights for social and economic justice.

According to Michelle R. Horvath, director of the Office of Citizenship and Community Standards, SDS member Will Chaney intentionally presented false or misleading information regarding the registered status of SDS on the Truman campus with the intent of defrauding the university.

Chaney pled innocent to the charges at an October 6 conduct board hearing. The conduct board decided to dismiss the charges against Chaney.

The controversy began when the Multicultural Affairs Center (MAC) included a notice of RiseUpOctober in its weekly email of events.

RiseUpOctober is a protest against police brutality to be held in New York City on October 24. The event will include speakers such as Cornel West, Carl Dix, and the families of victims of police brutality.

The MAC email noted that the Students for a Democratic Society student organization had invited members of the Revolutionary Communist Party to come from St. Louis to speak at a SDS meeting in the Aquadome, an off-campus venue, on September 19 to discuss the event.

The email led Lou Ann Gilchrist, the Dean of Student Affairs, to ask the MAC why it was advertising events by a non-registered student organization. Student Affairs charges that Chaney had presented SDS as a registered organization and asked the MAC for financial support. This might have put the university at a liability for student participation in RiseUpOctober.

Chaney denies any intent to mislead anyone into thinking that SDS was a registered organization, or that that SDS sought to solicit funds, university resources, or take advantage of any other organizations.

Meanwhile, on October 2, SDS was informed that it has been granted provisional status as a chartered organization through Truman's Center for Student Involvement.

Notably, Chaney's leadership of SDS advances exactly what Truman purports to advocate in its vision statement. That statement reads,

Truman will demonstrate its public liberal arts and sciences mission by developing educated citizens needed to protect our democracy and offer creative solutions to local, state, national and global problems. It will do so through transformative experiences that foster critical thought, daring imagination and empathetic understanding of human experiences at home and around the world. Truman graduates will be citizen-leaders committed to service; globally competitive; able to thrive in the complexities of an advanced, technical and multicultural world; and inspired to live healthy and meaningful lives.

Chaney's prosecution raises several key issues. Should students be punished for doing exactly what Truman claims it seeks to do, that is to foster engaged, active citizens?

In a time of tight budgets, does the university really have the available resources to create mountains out of molehills, and prosecute students for educating the campus on "creative solutions to local, state, national and global problems"?

Finally, if an administrative body engages in these types of tactics, perhaps it has fallen into the deadly trap of looking for excuses to justify its existence. In that case, tight resources should be redirected to parts of the university that foster and advance its public liberal arts and sciences mission.