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The College Voice, Vol. 57, no. 7 Special Edition insert [February 8, 2023]

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Recommended Citation

Connecticut College, "The College Voice, Vol. 57, no. 7 Special Edition insert [February 8, 2023]" (2023). 2022-2023. 8.

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The College Voice.

“80,000 Dollars Worth of an Opinion”

Editor’s Note:

In order to protect the privacy and livelihoods of students, faculty, and staff involved, we are refraining from naming our sources. We understand that using anonymous sources may impact the perception of our reporting, but we are verifying the validity and reliability of the information we receive through multiple perspectives.

What Happened?

On Feb. 7, 2023, Rodmon King, Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion, resigned at 10 am. Throughout the day, student leaders were notified of King’s decision. At roughly 6:30 pm, flyers were distributed across campus expanding on King’s decision to leave and condemning President Katherine Bergeron’s actions in relation to a Defying Boundaries fundraising event at the Everglades Club in Palm Beach, Florida. This event was scheduled for Feb. 8 but was removed from the

website late Monday, Feb. 6, at which point Bergeron was already in Florida in preparation for the event. While the event was canceled on Monday, calls for the event to be canceled were ongoing since its inception. Dean King and other people expressed concern over the event because of the Club’s prominent history of anti-Blackness and antisemitism.

What is the Everglades Club?

The Defy Boundaries campaign describes the Everglades Club as a “pre-eminent social club in Palm Beach since its founding in 1919. The club’s complex is believed to be where famed architect Addison Mizner first created the romantic mélange of architectural styles known around the world as ‘the Palm Beach look.’” The campaign fails to acknowledge the long history of exclusion of Black and Jewish people. For example, prominent Jewish businesswoman, Estee Lauder, attended an event at the club, which spurred the suspension of club membership for those who invited her. In addition, Sammy Davis Jr., a famous Black and Jewish musician, was barred from the

club. As noted by a select group of students who King met with, Bergeron’s knowledge of this problematic history did not stop her from moving forward with the event.

Reaction from the Administration:

At 7:25 pm on Feb. 7, Bergeron emailed a message announcing King’s resignation. The letter read: “I am writing to let you know that Rodmon King informed me today of his intention to resign from his role as dean of institutional equity and inclusion, effective immediately. I was saddened and shocked to receive this news.”

Bergeron failed to capitalize his title, “dean of institutional equity and inclusion,” and provided no explanation as to why King decided to resign. Unlike the countless other DIEI leaders that have left their positions in recent years, King does not have an-



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other position at another institution. This resignation was in protest of his mistreatment by the administration. Bergeron also announced, “Over the next few days, I am also holding open hours for anyone who would like to discuss this matter with me either individually or in small groups.”

A follow-up email was sent at 1:07 pm on Feb. 8, in which Bergeron first acknowledged the canceled event at the Everglades Club. She wrote, “Full participation is a core value at Conn, which is why I regret our decision to schedule an event at a location whose history and reputation suggest otherwise. We made that decision believing that our values were clear. But the decision to proceed came across differently, and we recognize now that we were wrong.” The email is signed solely by Bergeron; the body she refers to as “we” is never defined.

The College Voice reached out to Bergeron’s office for a comment. John Cramer, Vice President for Marketing and Communications, said: “President Bergeron did not tell or ask Dean King to write a statement defending the College’s initial decision about the event’s location. Consistent with her discussions with Dean King and other senior administrators, she asked him and others to offer their input on the College’s statement should we receive any inquiries about the location of the event. Again, the College ultimately canceled the event as she discussed in her campus message.”

Student Response:

On Wednesday evening, participating members of the campus community stood together as a united front to protest Bergeron’s actions. Students highlighted the lack of funding for the Division of Institutional Equity and Inclusion as the impetus behind Dean King’s resignation, as well as the excessive turnover within DIEI as evidence that staffers are overworked, underpaid, and unsupported. This is amid extensive fundraising efforts turning towards other campus projects. In the past four years, nearly every single DIEI staffer has left their position: Truth Hunter as Director of Race and Ethnicity Programs, Ebony Manning as Assistant Dean of Equity and Compliance and Title IX Coordinator, Maurice Tiner as Director of Race and Ethnicity Programs, Angela Nzegwu as Director of Religious and Spirituality Programs, Erin Duran as Director of Gender and Sexuality Programs, Rachel Stewart as Director of Sexual Violence Prevention and Advocacy, John McKnight as Dean

of Institutional Equity and Inclusion, and finally, Rodmon King as latest Dean of Institutional of Equity and Inclusion.

Broader DIEI Implications:

King’s resignation comes following, and in conjunction with, a long list of challenges facing the Division of Institutional Equity and Inclusion. The division has faced staffing shortages since any current student can remember, most notably with the recent departures of Rachel Stewart and Ebony Manning in the Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Advocacy. King took on additional responsibilities outside of his role to keep providing these resources for students. One of Bergeron’s first initiatives was to divide the role of Dean of the College into three roles: Dean of the College, Dean of Students, and Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion. However, upon Manning’s departure, King stepped in to take over Manning’s responsibilities in addition to his job description, demonstrating that this division has not actually divided responsibilities equally.

This has been an ongoing struggle for this division as it has been constantly experiencing staff turnover with only four of the eleven staff members starting at the College prior to the Fall of 2019 (the division’s webpage does not accurately reflect turnover in the last year). Students noted that this may be because certain positions in the division are not salaried, with one employee making \$26/hour. The Strategic Plan, “Building on Strength,” published in Fall 2016, includes goals for the Center of Critical Race and Ethnicity (CCSRE) and, as Bergeron wrote in her email, “full participation,” defined as the intersection between student experience, sustainable college, and academic distinction. DIEI is not included in this plan because it did not exist at the time of its publication. However, the issue of Equity and Inclusion is included in a plan created in 2019.

What’s the larger issue?

When speaking with the select students who met with King in the days prior to his resignation, The College Voice has learned that Bergeron’s actions in regard to the Everglades Club event, are not the sole reason for King’s departure. Bergeron has been accused of creating a distrustful working environment within the Senior Cabinet that belittled expert opinion and fostered a climate of fear. Bergeron’s actions and King’s resignation are not isolated incidents but rather the latest resulting from an institution with systemic issues surrounding the support of DIEI and their leadership.

A Note from The College Voice Editorial Staff:

TCV is the voice of the student body. It is our purpose to provide an outlet for students during times of uncertainty when student voices need to be heard. Ahead of our next print edition, which will come out in the next two weeks, we are accepting submissions on the topic. Additionally, to work in a more timely manner and to incorporate as many voices as possible, we are open to using our website, newsletter, and Instagram as outlets to amplify your opinions. Please reach out to our email with ideas or submissions or reach out to our editors directly and we will do everything in our power to spread your messages and hold the administration accountable.

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