ABSTRACT

College student activism can cripple a campus for decades, as evidenced by the tragedies of Kent State University and Jackson State University. To prepare for the engagement of students, college administrators must prepare themselves, both in plans and in mindset, for the possibility of disruptive activism, and this begins with the identification of what acceptable activism can and should include. Building on the mindset that activism can indeed be a good thing, for both students and the institution, administrators must create priorities that protect the welfare of all involved, including the institution’s brand and student learning. Subsequent thinking by campus leaders must maintain a humane and liberating response for students, and ultimately, although prepared, campus leaders must have a set of priorities planned that can incorporate and ultimately value the process of students speaking out on campus.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSE TO ACTIVISM

The tragedies of Kent State and Jackson State brought student activism to what some erroneously believed was its end in the spring of 1970. No longer seen as a national movement addressing transcendent themes, attracting a majority of students, nor occupying much time or space on campus quads, student activism in spirit and practice still effectively continued for decades in a smaller scale on the literal quad. For example, anti-apartheid activism arose on campus and then peaked with great...
effectiveness in the mid-1980s. Then, activism moved to the virtual campus quad until it recently, dynamically returned to the literal campus quad.

**To the Virtual Quad**

Later, student activists found the Internet provided increased access, inexpensive and larger outreach capability, endless stores of “instant” information, self-publication platforms, and a seeming safeguard for anonymity. With the wired generation’s exponentially increased sophistication and use of emergent technologies, student activism moved from being individualized and gradual to being instantaneous and viral social network power blocks.

Student activism moved to the virtual campus quad. Eventually, 45 years after Kent State and Jackson State, a new generation of higher education institution boards and executives had encountered and were increasingly capable in their response to students who expertly generated online activist media and networks. Then, almost suddenly, student activism returned to the literal campus quad.

**Back to the Literal Quad**

Students’ *en masse* return to activism on the quad began in 2015 with the nation’s attention turning to students’ raising of ongoing, systemic racism concerns in Missouri and at the University of Missouri. Students along with their banner held at a parade were ignored by Missouri’s chancellor, a student went on a hunger strike, other students held a supportive camp-in, members of the student media covering the story were confronted by a professor who called for “muscle” to remove them, and the football team gave support by deciding to forfeit rather than play. The chancellor and System president, slow to respond, lost their jobs.

In 2017-2018, student activism for different objectives continued on the literal quad at University of California Santa Cruz, University of Wisconsin-Superior, and elsewhere. Howard University students’ nine-day sit-in of the administration building yielded mixed perspective among alumni and other students, board agreements to address eight of nine student demands, and no confidence votes for board members and executives.

**Evolving Concepts and Practices of Response**

From nearly 50 years and the most recent years of student activism (and activism of “infiltrating” or “visiting” outsiders), lessons continue to evolve in regard to board and executive response to more sophisticated activism on the virtual and literal campus quad. This chapter is an exploration of conceptual and practical approaches
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