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12-10-1997

Maine Campus Observing King's legacy

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Repository Citation

Ritchie, Kathryn, "Maine Campus Observing King's legacy" (1997). *Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*. 138.

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Professor of Civil Engineering Dana Humphrey. (File photo.)

• Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Faculty push for UM observance

By Kathryn Ritchie
Maine Campus staff

Members of Faculty Senate will decide today whether University of Maine students will spend future Martin Luther King Jr. Days in the classroom or in celebration of the civil rights leader. According to UMaine's president, a vote to recognize the day as a school holiday would correct a "glaring discrepancy."

"I think it's much overdue," UMaine President Peter Hoff said recently. "I think the campus should be behind it."

If recognition of the holiday is passed today it's up to the

President to decide how soon it is fit into the academic calendar. James Varner, the president of the Bangor NAACP, is hoping the holiday will be celebrated this Jan. 19.

"I don't think (King) personally would want to see black people miss education," Varner said. "But I think the good of taking that day off will far outweigh missing education."

Most campuses in the University Maine System do recognize the holiday by either taking

the day off the academic calendar or by delaying the start of the semester until Jan. 20. The only two campuses which do not are the University of Maine at Fort Kent and the University of Maine. The University of Maine does recognize Labor Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving Day and the day after Thanksgiving.

The last time the senate reviewed Martin Luther King Jr. Day was in December 1994. At

See KING on page 7

• Yearbook



that time, a resolution passed to support the ideals of King but not take the day off on the academic calendar.

The General Student Senate took a similar stance last night, passing a proclamation to support Martin Luther King Jr. Day and other holidays, but not asking to have them off.

"I feel that it's a good compromise," Sen. Mellissa Williams Paradis said.

While the 1994 resolution passed by a close vote, the current Faculty Senate President is optimistic about the holiday's passage this time.

"I would say that I think there's a large number of faculty members that really support this," said Dana Humphrey, professor of civil engineering. "On the other side, there are faculty members that

are really jealous of their class time."

Hoff suggested that instead of focusing on the amount of time students spend in class, faculty should examine the real time on task issue, such as the amount of time a student puts into their work outside the classroom walls.

"It's my view that the accomplishments of Dr. King and the ideals for which he fought are important enough for a university holiday and that we use the day to further his ideals," Humphrey said.

Proposed ways to further King's ideals include holding seminars with off-campus speakers, discussion groups with people already on campus and other events to celebrate minority culture. Humphrey said it's tough for students to attend any of these activities if they are

supposed to be in class.

Special events have been held in the past to honor the holiday. Varner said he's expecting more than 400 people at this year's second annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day breakfast. He said he hopes people will walk away from the meal with ideas to keep King's dream alive all year long.

If the senate does not pass recognition of the holiday, Varner said that sends the message that the university is not willing to "join the real world."

"It's the thing to do in 1997," he said. "I'm not saying take the day off, I'm saying take the day off and do something."

Varner said black students have been encouraged for the last three or four years to skip classes that day and instead watch films about King's life. He said as a 1957 UMaine alumni, it makes him feel good that the holiday looks like it will be adopted by the university.

"I hate to use the word force, but this is going to force us to talk to one another," Varner said.

Hoff saw the passage as an excellent start toward the goal of diversity. When he came for his interview in May, he said inevitably someone in every campus session asked him about his commitment to diversity.

"I think the time has come to ask the campus what's its commitment is," Hoff said. "The president can't do it alone."

While she supports having Martin Luther King Jr. Day off, Student Body President Jenn Nelson would also like to see President's Day, Veterans Day and Patriots Day off.

"For me it's just as important to have

all these things passed," Nelson said. She said she thought a good percentage of students would do something to celebrate the holidays if they had the days off from school. This past Veterans Day, she had wanted to go place flowers and a flag on her grandfathers grave, but couldn't because she had to be in school.

"I was very upset I couldn't go honor my grandfather who served in three wars," she said.

Humphrey said each holiday will be weighed on its own individual merits. The passage of one won't guarantee the passage of others.

"I certainly do not see the senate agreeing to a tidal wave of days off," Humphrey said.

Sen. Jerry Graffam said he brought the idea supporting Martin Luther King Jr. Day holiday to the public relations committee in GSS, of which he is chair, and received a lot of negative feedback.

"A lot of people thought it was bad for the public relations committee to support students not going to classes," Graffam, who disagreed with his groups consensus, said. "It's not just because the banks are closed, it's why they're closed."

Graffam said as a public institution receiving government funds the university should recognize that the government deems the day important enough to celebrate.

"Let's face it, kids are going to skip that day anyway. They should do it for a reason," Graffam said.

The public is welcome to attend the 3:15 p.m. meeting in the Dexter Lounge, located in the Alford Arena, and voice any concerns.

Police

from page 3

smoke detectors were later found in the men's bathroom. Officers couldn't determine where the fourth detector came from.

*Sometime between 6 p.m. on Dec. 5 and 12:30 p.m. on Dec. 6, a UMaine student had a license plate stolen off of his car—for the second time.

Public Safety Tip of the Week:

License plate thefts are not a rare oc-

currence on campus, according to Public Safety Lt. Mike Zubik. This semester has seen almost a half dozen. In past years, several dozen have been reported stolen in the span of a few months. While it is rare to catch someone in action, people are bound to see other students' collections. It's no fun to have one, Zubik said, unless they can show it off. When they do, Public Safety would like to be notified.

Open
your mind
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