

News

Chairman, student run into post office conflict

Jennifer Brunson
Pilot copy editor

Tommy Hardin, chairman of the board of trustees, in a meeting with residents of H.A.P.Y. and Royster Halls and students on Memorial Drive, made the statement "You can always communicate."

In response to this statement, senior Aleasha Winters asked, "Then why was your phone number taken out of our mailboxes?"

Senior Brian Robertson is at the center of the mailbox-flyer controversy. On Monday, Sept. 16, at around 7 p.m., Robertson called Hardin and asked Hardin if he wanted to hear from the students. Hardin stated to Robinson, "The phone is always open." Robertson then told him of his intentions to place flyers in students' mailboxes.

"I told him what I was doing. He knew numbers were going out with information and he hadn't objected to it."

Robertson made copies of the flyer and went to the campus post office. The staff in the post office told him that it was all right to put them in the mailboxes.

In Robertson's account, when Janis Brannon, who works at the post office, looked at the flyers, she read it and said that she needed to talk to Donnie Clary, vice president for business and finance.

Brannon left to call Clary. When she returned, she asked Robertson if he had permission from Hardin to put the flyers in the mailboxes. Robertson said, "Yeah, I talked to Hardin."

Hardin was on campus at the time of this incident.

In the H.A.P.Y./Royster/Memorial Drive session with students, Hardin explained, "I was informed. I was in a little office working that morning. Someone [Donnie Clary] came to me and said, 'Did you give permission for a person to place letters or flyers in the mailboxes?' I don't have that authority. And I said no."

Hardin continued, "[Clary said] 'Well there is a young man stuffing the mailboxes and he said he had permission from you.' Let's go."

Robertson said both Clary and Hardin came down to the post office. "They accused me of saying that Hardin gave me permission to put the flyers in the boxes."

Hardin said, "I went to the post office and I confronted this young man. And I said [to him]: 'You have stated that I gave you permission. Who are you? Who are you? You have stated that I gave you permission to put these in the mailboxes?'"

"And he [Robertson] said, 'I talked to you last night. And you said you would talk to the students.' I said, 'That's a big difference than me giving you permission to stuff these mailboxes. Now as far as I'm concerned, you don't have permission to use me to stuff those mailboxes.'"

Robertson does not believe that he needs permission to put

anything in the mailboxes of students because they are public records. In an interview with the *Pilot*, Robertson asked, "Why would I need permission?"

According to Robertson, there was a question about the introduction in the flyers that said 'save our professors.' They also said something like, 'If Dr. White stays, many will be fired or will resign.'

In regards to the introduction of the flyer, Hardin responded, "You're a liar. You're printing lies."

Robertson then said to Hardin, "Tell me what you want me to change." Hardin did not respond to the request, said Robertson.

In response, Hardin said, "There is some disagreement as to who said the flyers should be removed." In his session with the students, Hardin said, "I didn't tell him to take them out. The postal workers started taking them out." On the other hand, Robertson said that Brannon asked, "Do you want

me to take them out?" Clary and Hardin instructed them to remove the flyers, said Robertson.

As stated by Robertson, Hardin said, "Don't you go tell anybody that I blocked you from doing this. And I won't go tell anybody this."

Hardin responded to this statement by saying, "Ultimately, the flyers were taken out of the students' boxes and the issue seemed to be closed."

However, Robertson still has strong feelings about what occurred. Robertson believes that Hardin "took away my freedom of speech, freedom of press and tried to intimidate me. He was trying to silence me."

Robertson explained, "My goal [in putting out the flyers] was to give students a forum to speak. We were hidden from the facts. If students were compelled to have a voice, we would have a voice."

HARDIN: White violated policy

Hardin from page 1

He also felt that Hardin's response was "very ironic" in that it indicated that White did in fact violate policy.

In response to Hardin's comment in the Oct. 2 meeting, Burch re-emphasizes his statement made during the Sept. 12 student forum.

"As I stated in the student forum, I regret my actions and feel that I overstepped my responsibilities in regard to speaking with Dr. White regarding Carlos Webb," Burch said.

Senior Brian Robertson was also present at the Oct. 2 meeting. He considers Hardin's comment about Porter's question "a major turning point in the entire situation because we now have the chairman of the board of trustees admitting that White and Burch both violated policy."

Robertson felt that Hardin was "caught off guard" by the effort the students put into their research.

"According to the question and the answer, Burch violated the academic appeals policy by intervening on behalf of the student in an academic decision. White also violated the policy by first, not dismissing the appeal and second, by further repealing the request to the registrar," said Robertson.

Robertson proceeded to explain that this policy was not mentioned in the



Photo by Scott Holstein

Tommy Hardin, chairman for the board of trustees, talks as he walks out of a student meeting.

report prepared by the representatives from Decker, Hallman, Barber & Briggs, P.C. He pointed out that on page 14 of the lawyer's "Report to the Board of Trustees," it states, "President White intervened even though the student did not personally appeal his conviction, based upon an appeal made by the vice president for athletics."

Hardin and White were not available for comment.

Students' statements not used

Emily Killian
Pilot copy editor

Sixteen students were involved in a focus group conducted by Matt Webber, director of university communications, on Sept. 24.

They were under the impression that their conversations would be recorded and that the things they discussed would be presented to the board of trustees before their meeting on Sept. 28. The students were not required to give their names to either Webber or to the board of trustees.

Patrick Woody, SGA president, along with senior Michael Rakes, participated in the focus group.

Questions, such as "What are the strengths of Gardner-Webb University?", "What do you think of the faculty and administration?", "How did you view the school before?" and "How do you view the school now?" were posed to the students for discussion, said Rakes.

"Everyone was allowed to speak and voice his or her opinion."

Rakes said that there were 16 students present, along with Webber, Monica Stucky, an attorney, and one other representative, possibly from Hallman's firm. The students were

instructed not to address one another by their names because the meeting would be confidential.

Webber asked Bruce Moore to select a group of 10 to 15 students that represented different demographics on campus, such as underclassmen, upperclassmen, males and females as well as show a racial diversity.

Woody was told about the 1:30 p.m. meeting shortly before it started.

The group was formed to give a "cross-section of the students a chance to express concerns about the current situation," said Webber. "It was simply a time of unbridled feedback so that feelings and opinions could be shared."

Woody was informed that the students' discussions would be reported to the trustees.

"The tape and transcript of the meeting was turned over to the board chairman. I know this because he asked me questions about the meeting after he had a chance to review the participants' feedback," said Webber.

"I was extremely disappointed and saddened," said Woody about the lack of response from the trustees on the matter.