

Get Ready to Rumble

Everyone loses when you fight administrators

By Felicia J. Barclay

It's your first meeting as a Student Government executive with the university president. You arrive on time, dressed appropriately and well-prepared. After the introductions, you immediately begin pushing an agenda and making demands. But it's obvious that the president isn't listening. So you move to "Plan B"—chaining yourself to the president's door and holding a protest in front of the administration building.

Protests may get you media attention, but being respectful and accepting compromise usually gets results. Your first instinct may be to throw rallies or hold protests just to be heard, but there are better ways to express yourself more tactfully with administrators.

"Notoriously on every campus, the reasons students protest and have rallies is because they don't feel like administrators listen, and sometimes they don't," says Steve Wymer, **Washington State University's** and perhaps the nation's first and only three-term Student Government Association president (1998-2001).

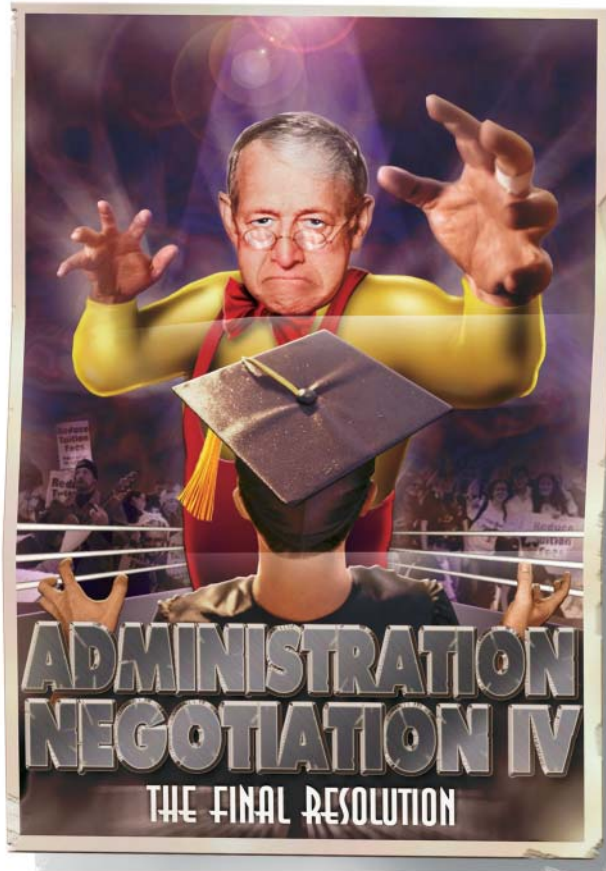
While protesting could be an option, it should be your last resort. "Students have many alternatives to direct confrontation as a method to resolve issues, including going directly to the president of the institution," says William Asbury, vice president for student affairs at **Pennsylvania State University**. "Students have to be willing to communicate directly before using the media to get the attention of the institution's leadership." E-mailing, informal meetings with administrators, and personal letters are a few ways to start building a relationship with the administration early in your term.

The reality is that "the people who are running the show are the administrators, and you have to work with them," says Doug Hartz, president of Associated Students at the **University of Arizona**. "Part of being in this type of position is knowing that you have the responsibility to people to make sure SG is perceived as being competent and dedicated to the university and its students." Work toward improving SG's image with the administration. Doing your homework and research before any meeting, improving voter

turnout, and making sure students sit on all possible campus committees are strong steps toward gaining credibility.

With some administrators, it's not always easy to get your point across. They're used to seeing a new SG president with a new agenda each year. Show that you're different and willing to compromise by giving administrators three options and alternatives when you make a request, and be ready to accept any of them.

"It's important for student leaders to



recognize that universities are large organizations," says Karen Kenney, dean of students at the **University of California, Berkeley**. Not surprisingly, administrators are busy people. Although you may feel that new bike racks should be the school's top priority, it may take some time for administrators to get to your concerns. "It's important for students to have realistic time frames for achieving goals," she says. Kenney, who has been dean for 25 years, also says that student leaders should make an effort to understand the life and role of an administrator. Even the president reports to the board of trustees and has priorities

and directives that demand her attention. Your project probably falls toward the bottom of her "to do" list.

By building a good relationship, you'll cut through bureaucratic red tape. Arriving on time to meetings, getting to know each administrator individually, and letting them know who you are and what your goals are for the year are all ways to earn respect and be taken seriously.

Of course, both sides must agree to work together to build this relationship. Some administrators just aren't going to support your cause. You should try to get their opinion up front through candid discussions. Why break your back when nothing will ever come of it? "Both the administrators and the students have to have a real commitment to collaboration, communication, and relationship building," Kenney says. "Relationships need to be formed before a controversial issue emerges."

Administrators must be willing to come out of their authoritative shells and open up. "I try to remember the fact that I was a student once, too," says Eugene Zdziarski, dean of students at the **University of Florida**. "Listening to the students and the students having a voice on what takes place on campus is a critical part of the educational process. When I start thinking that I have all the answers, then maybe it's time for me to move on."

When a relationship is finally cemented with the administration, there's no telling how successful SG can be. "In a bureaucracy, you have to establish rapport and relationships and sit down and have discussions," says Richard Walker, director of Student Life and University Center and SG advisor at the **University of Miami** in Florida. As a result of good relationship-building, former SG President Jose "Pept" Diaz gained final approval for a student to be elected as a voting member of UM's trustees, a rarity among private colleges and universities. "The administration at UM is the backbone of our success," Diaz says. "The administration fully supported

our endeavors to better our school." He says that every single problem that was brought to his attention was resolved within the academic year. Of Diaz's administration, Walker says, "They knew how to get things accomplished because they were able to establish good relationships."

Building good relationships will help you work well with administrators this year. And don't forget—in the real political and business world, protests will just get you ousted or fired. **SL**

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