

The following is a selection from a April 6th, 2015 interview with Alice Preketes, an employee of the Donor Relations Department at the University of Michigan during the movement, conducted in Ann Arbor, MI by Mario Goetz:

How did you come to work in the Donor Relations Office?

I graduated from the University of Michigan and I had a degree in Journalism and writing and I was working as an editor at the University and got hired into the development office as an editor, and because of my writing skills and my global perspective, the head of the program at the time started giving me things to improve and make better. So I started fixing peoples' proposals, I started doing all their direct mail because I knew a little bit about direct mail and I worked my way up to the development office and donor relation was a part of that and Anita Miller had some ideas about how that whole area was run and brought me in to help develop some of those programs with her. It was pretty cutting edge at the time. It was a lot of fun, I got to do a lot of interesting and creative things and work with major donors in very positive ways. . . My job was to let people know what was happening and get them excited about it.

While you were there, there was a lot going on, were there certain things that stick out to you about the anti-apartheid movement? Defined perception or just something you sometimes heard about?

Obviously I was working in the FAD or somewhere on central campus so it was totally clear to me where the demonstrations were because sometimes you couldn't get into a building and sometimes you'd walk through it, and generally speaking the students were pretty polite about it, even though they were frustrated. And to my mind, when I was at school, it was the beginning of the Black Action Movement and it seemed to me that the anti-apartheid was just a continuation of those sentiments more broadly put forth, except that it was pretty obvious to most people that that wasn't right and something needed to change and so it was good that the students kept it in front of the regents because changing that apartheid issue was really such an extensive movement that even though the students ...do this now to have influence, being on the more, so-called adult side of this you realize that a change like that is extensive and you just don't change it without making sure that you have a structure in place to make the change successful. So what I remember about it is that there was a lot of activity going on and the students were very impatient about it taking place because students are impatient, and behind the scenes, a lot of people were trying to figure out how they could do this and foster the change that everybody knew had to happen. And obviously it wasn't only happening on our campus because the other major research universities were having similar activities and major research universities have a little different perspective than your general university or college. They're better funded, they're encouraged to be more creative, the students are

interested in more than just getting through so they can make enough money because they're working their way through, working 20 hours a week. So it took some of the major institutions like the University of Michigan to have some leverage, and of course they also had alumni who were in the corporations whose stocks were going to have impact. So even though I was not a part of it there had to be some activities behind the scenes to help foster the change.

How was it difficult to implement, and what steps had to be taken?

The circumstances are that divestment itself, obviously the staff that are in charge of that would need to find ways to change or move the money and the main concern is we need a lot of money to run the institution. And the companies that were in South Africa at the time were very profitable. So the first thing we didn't want to do was make too big a dent in the income of the university because that would be paramount and as a donor you didn't want to see your efforts drained under those circumstances. So that had to happen. But at the same time, to divest like that it has an impact on the company in that country, it has an impact on the government, but it has an impact on the people who are working there. And the very people who were subjected to apartheid were the people who were going to be hurt the most by losing jobs or things like that. So there was always concerns, and I can't tell you what the administration was doing in that regard but people were clearly aware that divestiture was for us an issue that needed to be managed politically and financially in a smart way, but there were underlying ramifications that were pretty global relative to what might happen to South Africa if somebody pulled out because we don't know what is going to happen if we take a stand like that. You always hope that they're in talks with the leadership, and truly the ruling whites had to see it coming. They were smart people, and it's relatively well known that they positioned themselves for a safe and useful, profitable exit. But still, I'm dealing with donors and the their first concerns were that the university be adequately funded if they made the divestiture, and those donors would be the ones that gave the money or the stocks in the first place. It just takes a lot of money to run an organization like the University of Michigan, so you have to think clearly. It's not that anyone was in favor of apartheid; it's just that people wanted it to be addressed in a logical and prudent manner.

Our job is to represent the University in a light that the public would understand, that the donors would understand. So we would be sharing the same view, obviously we would share the same view, the view would be from the Regents and the executive office and all we would be doing is reinforcing their perspectives, because that's the right thing to do. And really who could argue with it?

What were the reactions of donors? Did views change? How did they express themselves to you?

Truthfully, the people who had the most influence would have been talking to the vice president for development and the president of the University and probably the vice president of finance. Generally speaking those would have been in one-on-one or small-sided or individual groups, cell phone calls where people would be discussing what was going on and the concerns. It was deliberately made clear to people that this just wasn't going to be a snap judgment. People were going to proceed in an appropriate manner to address it, but it did need to be addressed because it was obvious that the issue needed to be pushed. So mostly for us at our level we would talk to people and someone would say well I'm still not comfortable with it, and I would say something like, you know, none of us are comfortable with it to the extent that we're concerned with how we do this financially, but none of us are comfortable with apartheid either. Everybody had to agree because nobody wanted it to go on. Everyone could see it was a leftover colonial operation that needed to transition.

How was divestment as strategy settled upon?

Once again, those comments probably would have been directed to the president or vice president and obviously there's always someone who has a different idea. I will say that our general feeling was that people needed to be heard and Roy Muir who was vice-president of development, I think, at the time, maybe not, I don't know who it was, but people needed to be heard. You don't necessarily have to do what they say, but you have to give them a chance to be heard. You have to take what they say under consideration even if you're not going that way. Usually if you give people the opportunity to be heard and they know that you considered their judgment, even though they might not entirely agree with what you're doing, they'll be more on board with you than if you blow them off. That was always our approach, which is that everyone had a chance to be heard.

Who reached out to the donors to let them know?

Generally speaking, there were magazine articles and newsletters and what have you. It was explained in the media the University put out. And then if people had concerns, they would usually come back to the University by way of who their main link was. Their main link might be me, it might be their major gift officer, it might have been their relationship with someone else, so it would always come back that way. Certainly we all knew what the university's policies and plans were and we were all able to articulate them, and we understood other peoples' points of view and we were able to acknowledge that, and we were able to explain why this was going to work better for the university

than that. But we were also able to explain that it's not cast in stone. If you take this course and it's not quite where you think it should go then you can change direction, and the investment staff, they'd come up with a pretty reasonable way to explain how they could do this and not really damage the endowment.

So it was possible?

To an extent, and really it worked out probably better than a lot of people expected. You know, South Africa did not totally collapse, right? But there's always that concern. There's huge businesses in there. You don't really know how well prepared the leadership of that country is, how much they've transferred information to the rest of the public. The problem is always have the lower levels of people been educated to step up, or is there a way that you can make that grow smoothly or are you just going to bail and let them flounder for themselves. And truthfully I don't in detail remember how that went, I just remember that it turned out that the negative impacts, I think, on the university's endowment were not as great as some people expected. The businesses saw it coming. They were able to condition themselves to offset any negative effects. It was a planned move overall. Maybe not extensively planned, but it had been coming enough. The idea had been coming long enough that I think people had started to position themselves anyway.

On discussion between DRO and president, vice president, and the administration:

It was not for what we do. It was a small piece of what was going on in the global world. If you were protesting, it certainly was a main theme, but for the rest of us it was one of a myriad of elements that go through one's daily life, one's daily business life, and has to be considered, has to be understood, and we all had to be in a position to respond. It certainly was not the central theme of one's daily life, except maybe on the days when you couldn't get into the administration building, or you're on the phone talking to someone who says they're evacuating us out the steam tunnel. But generally speaking, the University of Michigan has been at the fore of a lot of social issues, and it's really nice that students can drive that. It's politically advantageous that students can drive that. And when you've been there for a while it's like well this is the next issue. Let's see where it's going to go and do something productive with it. It's not that you don't know the issues are there, you're just waiting for their time to come.

On the perspective of university leadership on activists:

For me it was a long time ago. When you've been through so many of them to remember the details of this one versus another one is pretty slim. I would say that in general most of the protests were noisy, but peaceful. Once in a while, and I don't recall, there were a few occasions where they were a little bit destructive, and certainly some occasions where they were interruptive, greatly interruptive, but I don't know that people necessarily felt at risk. You always wonder when you have a mass of people sitting on your desk, if that can't be erupting some emotional problems, but in general they were certainly noisy, and there was certainly a level of frustration. People call it anger, but I would call it frustration that things weren't changing fast enough, and therefore a little concern that something might erupt. But I honestly don't remember anything...I don't remember anything violent, as opposed to back when we were having all the racial violence in Detroit and Toledo and everywhere, and a little bit on campus. I do not recall there being anything equivalently detrimental. But I could be wrong because that was a long time ago and I've done a lot since then, and the psychology of memory says you fill in the blanks.