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12 students arrested in Fleming

BY
KELLYFRASER
Daily News Editor
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Campus police arrested 12 student activists yesterday after they refused to leave University President Mary Sue Coleman's office in the Fleming Administration Building when it closed at 5 p.m.


<http://www.michigandaily.com/files/leg/pb7e942.jpg>

Jessica Bouillion

LSA freshman Yousef Rabhi is escorted out of the Fleming Building yesterday evening. (ZACHARY MEISNER/Daily)


<http://www.michigandaily.com/files/leg/34wvx3th.jpg>

Jessica Bouillion

LSA junior Aria Everts is put into the back of a police car. (ZACHARY MEISNER/Daily)

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The protesters, who staged the sit-in as part of Students Organizing for Labor and Economic Equality's Sweatfree Campaign, were all released later last night. They were demanding that the University toughen its labor standards for suppliers producing University-licensed apparel.

Administrators didn't interfere with the students or ask them to leave until the office closed, protesters said.

At about 5:20 p.m., Dean of Students Sue Eklund and Gary Krenz, special counsel to the president, gave the students a final warning before waiting Department of Public Safety officers entered the office to arrest the students.

"I want to make sure that an arrest this evening feels like this is the best decision to help your cause," Eklund told the protesters.

Everyone remaining in the building, including news reporters, was then warned that if they did not vacate the building immediately they risked arrest.

Before taking the students into custody, police again gave each protester the option of leaving the building.

Meanwhile, about 40 SOLE supporters circled the building chanting phrases like "The students united will not be defeated" and drumming on buckets.

The crowd formed a line and cheered as police led each protester from the building and into police vehicles. The last student was led from the building at about 7 p.m.

The students were taken to the Department of Public Safety's holding facility on Kipke Road, processed and released.

The students don't plan on returning to Fleming tomorrow, said SOLE member Blase Kearny, who was one of the 12 students arrested. Because the students were read a trespass warning by police, they are legally banned from Fleming, DPS spokeswoman Diane Brown said.

The students began their occupation at about 9:30 yesterday morning when they presented Coleman with a list of demands, centered on adopting the Designated Suppliers' Program.

If the University adopted the program, all suppliers manufacturing University-licensed apparel



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would have to agree to provide workers with union representation and a wage high enough for a worker to support his or her family by working no more than 48 hours a week. Suppliers would also have to submit to regular inspections by the Workers' Rights Consortium, the group that developed the program.

The University currently monitors labor practices through its Vendor Code of Conduct.

SOLE members contend that the code is ineffective.

The group's demands also include restructuring the Labor Standards and Human Rights Committee, which is charged with reviewing the University's labor guidelines.

The students - dressed as if for a day at the office - brought pillows, sleeping bags and backpacks full of food. They occupied themselves during the day by blogging developments on their website and reading testimonials from sweatshop workers out loud. They also used Facebook.com to publicize the protest.

University spokeswoman Kelly Cunningham said there is no standard University protocol for handling sit-ins. She said the students were allowed to stay during business hours because they were not causing a disturbance.

The students also scattered letters of support they had received on the floor of the office.

University spokeswoman Julie Peterson confirmed that the office received hundreds of e-mails, faxes and phone calls over the course of the day.

"There is clearly a very organized campaign underway," she said.

Sit-ins at the University have a long history. In November 1966, 1,500 students defied a ban on sit-ins issued earlier that month and occupied three floors of the building the administration was housed in at the time. The students were protesting the University's provision of class rankings to the Selective Service.

In March 1999, 30 SOLE members demanding that the University set tougher labor standards for its apparel supplier occupied the office of then-University President Lee Bollinger for 51 hours. Those protesters left on their own, saying that administrators had met most of their demands.

Brown said the protesters were forcibly removed from the president's office this time because of changes to security procedures after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"It's been an ongoing effort across the University not only by DPS but by schools, colleges and departments to address security issues," she said. "If unauthorized people were allowed to stay in the building, it takes away the resources of DPS from dealing with other situations on campus."

Kearney, though, said he and his fellow protesters were arrested for another reason - a difference in leadership styles between Coleman and Bollinger.

"The fact that Mary Sue Coleman is the president is why we were arrested," he said, noting that Columbia University, where Bollinger is now president, has adopted the Designated Supplier Program.

University alum Rodolfo Palma, who was one of the protesters in 1999, hailed yesterday's sit-in in an interview yesterday. He, too, said Coleman was responding differently than Bollinger.

"(Bollinger) never said yes, but at least he took us seriously," Palma said. "She seems like she is completely disregarding things that are important to students."

Kearney said the sit-in was a success because of the media attention and student support it generated.

While the sit-in continued at Fleming, SOLE member Leigh Wedenjoa questioned Coleman during an LSA Honors Program luncheon in Mason Hall.

Coleman said she cared deeply about student input but that she must follow the processes for addresses student concerns.

"Ultimately, my responsibility is to listen to the advice from a broad spectrum," she said. Wedenjoa continued to question Coleman.

Coleman remained calm, and the conversation ended when she retorted: "I don't sit in my office and be the grand pooh-bah and say thou shall do X, Y and Z."

At about 4:30 p.m., Krenz offered to arrange a meeting for the protesters with himself, Labor Standards and Human Rights Committee Chair Laurence Root, Vice President for Student Affairs Royster Harper and University General Counsel Martin Krislov today.

The students declined the offer because Coleman would not be present.



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The Labor Standards and Human Rights Committee is scheduled to submit a report to Coleman on April 20 providing proposals on how to strengthen the Vendor Code of Conduct. Coleman has offered to meet with SOLE after she reviews the committee's recommendations on April 20.

Root said the committee is working on ways to ensure suppliers enforce labor standards. He said he expects the committee to vote on the recommendations during its last scheduled meeting next week.

Root said the committee's main concerns with the Designated Suppliers' Program are its feasibility.

"We felt that the (program) raised more questions than it answered," he said.

The students arrested were: LSA juniors Adam Lax and Aria Everts; LSA sophomore Blase Kearney, LSA freshman Yousef Rabhi, LSA seniors Noah Link and Alex Bryan; RC sophomore Kate Barut; RC junior Jason Bates; RC freshmen Lauren Keils, Sophie Reich and Alex Jakubiec; and Music sophomore Jonathan Duggan.

Brown said the students were arrested for violating a 1970 state law. The law makes it a misdemeanor for a person breaking the rules of a college or university to remain in a place after being asked by an officer of the university to leave and if the person risks causing harm or is disrupting or preventing the functioning of the institution.

Violators face fines of up to \$500 and or 30 days in prison.

The group is soliciting donations on its website, [uofmsitin.com](http://www.uofmsitin.com) (<http://www.uofmsitin.com>), to help cover fines and legal costs.

- Andrew Grossman contributed to this report.

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