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# The Candor

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## BenU Professor Uses Racial Slurs In Class

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*Benedictine University, Biology Professor, Dr. Allison Wilson, uses two racial slurs in class.*

Kaitlyn Estopare: Editor-In-Chief

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A Benedictine Professor used two racial slurs during a class discussion on February eighth. The Professor, Dr. Allison Wilson from Biology was trying to make a point about race relations in different generations.

“We were in shock, we were trying to figure out if she said it before we jumped to any conclusions, it was ten seconds of silence and then we continued on with the class,” said Jennifer Brown Griffin, a senior student present in the class.

“This is an incident where we didn’t do too good looking out for others. I will not have anyone in this community feeling unsafe, marginalized, underrepresented, or with no voice, so help me God I will do what we have to do and I’m tired of this, this is something you don’t make excuses for,” stated President Gregory.

Dr. Wilson was auditing the Women in the Law class taught by Dr. Tammy Sarver from Political Science, to get information for the creation of a new course, Biology of Women.

During the class on Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism, Dr. Saver posed the question of how the class felt about the expression, “I don’t see color.”

“Dr. Wilson said that she was taught not to see color by her parents as a reaction to their upbringing by a grandfather who would routinely point to a Black person and say “Look, there’s an (n-word),” stated Dr. Sarver.

Students also reported she not only used the n-word but also another racial slur, C\*\*n.

”The class was like ‘did we hear right? What’s going on?’” added Griffin.

“I believe that Dr. Wilson was trying to make a point that her grandfather was a racist and she was taught differently by her own parents and strived to raise her only daughter differently,” said Dr. Sarver.

Dr. Wilson declined to comment.

Many people on campus, including President Charles Gregory, were offended by the words.

“This is not about free speech, the day that I offend someone is the day that I give up my rights. My rights end if I’ve offended you. And if we don’t know the difference in what we can say and what we can’t say, shouldn’t say, have no right to say, then what does that say about us? What education are we getting if we don’t know? We are smarter than that,” stated President Gregory.

“During the next class session, we all sat in a circle and took turns expressing how we were feeling about what happened. I think the conversation went as well as

possible; it was emotionally charged at times, but I truly believe it was a good conversation and a learning experience for many of us,” said Dr. Sarver.

According to Griffin, the debate with the students during their class discussion was whether Dr. Wilson said the slurs with malicious intent or if it was just in passing. Many of the class members believed that it doesn't matter what the intentions or context was and that it represents the system and institution.

“I don't think that there's any justification for saying that word, even if it was just for an example she could have just simply said back in the day people used to say the n-word instead of actually saying the word. It is such a derogatory and demeaning word to people,” said Audrey Hanson, a student at Benedictine University.

“For it to come out so naturally, it was like you actually use this in your everyday language,” said Griffin.

“I am embarrassed and I feel badly for our community,” stated President Gregory.

Griffin created a letter about the incident and it was circulated amongst faculty and staff, which brought the incident to a much larger audience.

“I was touched and just amazed by the courage that it took to write that. I think that the message is hearing the hard truths and the lived experiences and now I think we as a community have to receive that with an open heart and open mind to understand and to act,” said Dr. Kenneth Newbold, Provost, and Chief Academic Officer.

Many people see this as not just an isolated incident but as a symptom of deeper problems on campus within university institution.

### **Racial Concerns on Campus**

Sophia LeNoir is the secretary of the Black Student Union (BSU): “This is only one of many incidents that happened on campus now, and in the past, and unfortunately maybe in the future. It was kind of heartbreaking to know that despite all of the hard work to bring inclusivity and handle social injustice not only on campus but off campus too this is still happening in the classroom.”

In 2020, the BSU drafted a demand letter, in which they spoke of the changes they want to see on campus. The letter circulated among many different groups.

“One of the changes we wanted was to provide an anti-racism, hate, and bias training for faculty and staff and implement that into the class. We also demanded to hire more black professors and black faculty and staff that's outside of athletics. Because you don't have much representation outside of athletics,” said LeNoir.

“It’s one of the contributing factors of why there are such instances happening in these classrooms,” LeNoir added.

To confront this issue of diversity in faculty hires, according to Newbold, Benedictine’s division of academic affairs is actively searching for an associate provost for diversity and inclusion and are close to hosting candidates on campus for the position. He confirmed that this associate provost position will handle incidents such as those that occurred on the 8th.

“It takes intention, self-study, and, work to truly be inclusive... Words have power, and they have meaning, and they have an impact, and that’s something that I don’t feel like I’m expert enough to answer how we’ll address that as a community,” said Dr. Newbold.

Black Student Union President, Shay Grady, and Vice President, Mercedes Wynter, will be meeting with Dr. Newbold regarding the incident and will be discussing new ways to amplify the antiracism training because this situation was believed by Black Student Union to be 100% preventable.

LeNoir expressed that Black Student Union always likes to ask students and members of the community, ‘what do you want to see on campus’ and ‘how can they talk to the higher-ups so they can make it happen.

“There are many times where many black students will come to campus for a first semester and realize they don’t feel safe here either for academic reasons, financial reasons, social reasons, and they transfer out within the semester, and the retention rate goes down, and that’s a big problem,” said LeNoir.

“I’m hurt for the institution but I’m also hopeful, that we take this and as a community, we say “this is it, this is the last time this will happen”. Not because we want it to be but intentionally make this the last time this happens. I’m prayerful, my patience has just about run its route,” stated President Gregory.

At this time the University would not comment on what sanction or punishment the professor will receive.

*Note: Students from the Basic Reporting class contributed to this article.*

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