Craighead defends delay hearing complaints

by Gordon Loane
Brunswickan News

Dean of Residence, John Craighead is defending the length of time it took to deliver written replies to several complaints launched by Neill House residents against Don Jeff Wedge.

In an interview with *The Brunswickan*, Craighead said that while just over two months may seem a long time to respond to concerns raised, there was certainly no inaction on his part. "The complaints were given to Tom Austin (Dean of Students) on November 23 and I met with the President of Neill House on November 29 to discuss them," said Craighead. "I then met with the Don prior to Christmas and incorporated those complaints into his Christmas review," he said.

Craighead said his discussion with Wedge was lengthy. "I mentioned in my letter to Neill House some of the concerns which are basically related to the Don's style and he agreed to address them in second term."

Craighead said it was almost the end of the term when he got the complaints and there were two other matters that had nothing to do with Neill House, including the resignation of the Residence Life Manager, that had to be dealt with.

"After Christmas break my ability to respond to the complaints was further delayed by the most recent events in Neill House," said Craighead referring to incidents January 19 and 20 in which four students were subsequently evicted and the House Committee was dissolved.

The Dean went on to explain why the addition of an Associate Don for Neill House is under consideration. There are two main reasons, according to Craighead. "It's an acknowledgment that the House and Don have gone through a very tumultuous year," he said. "Extra resources would be good to have in the House as far as programming is concerned and as an extra person just to listen to people's concerns."

Craighead said it's evident that there are some people who have difficulty communicating with the Don. "The purpose is to provide yet another avenue for people to deal with if they find it difficult to deal with Jeff Wedge," the Dean said.

The addition of a prospective Associate Don does not indicate a lack of confidence in Wedge at least in Craighead's eyes. "It indicates a willingness to address the concerns in Neill House," he said.

Craighead attended a Neill House meeting just over two weeks ago. The Dean admits residents are suspicious about a possible appointment. "Some think I would be appointing another gatekeeper," Craighead said. "Once I explained what is being mulled over, residents started asking positive questions about what kind of personality was envisioned and what involvement they could have in screening candidates."

Craighead gave assurances that residents will have a role to play in the appointment. "If we found two or three acceptable candidates, I would have no problem with the house meeting with the candidates and deciding which one they would prefer."

A decision on whether to proceed with the appointment is expected in the next few weeks, according to Craighead. Despite the upheaval at Neill House, Craighead expects a fair number of residents will re-apply next year. He said eight residents left earlier but none have chosen to do so lately.

Craighead warns that those who do apply next year should be prepared to follow the rules of the Residence Community. "People should not re-apply if they are not conformable with the rules," he said. The Dean also said a decision on Wedge's future should be made before May 31.

It is at that time that Neill residents applying for re-admissions are required to make a $300 deposit to hold their rooms for next September. All first year Dons are subject to a review at the end of the initial year, according to Craighead.

"Wedge has a three year contract as Don, but the first year is probationary," the Dean said.

In any case Craighead thinks Neill residents have been shooting the messenger when it comes to Wedge. "It wasn't the Don that walked up there and did something about the incidents of January 19 and 20," he said. "It wasn't the Don that brought the House Committee before the Inter-Residence Disciplinary Committee and it wasn't the Don that evicted the four students from Neill House."

Craighead wanted to clarify concerns raised about tensions between Wedge and former House Janitorial Supervisor Scott Patterson. "There have been concerns about the level of janitorial service in several houses over the last while," said Craighead. He added that at the beginning of this school year, it was at the point where if standards did not improve the university was willing to look at other options to get the houses cleaned. "We've spent time and effort training and re-training people to keep students employed," he continued.



Neill House still in turmoil

Photo: Mark Bray

"Dons in each house sign the contracts for cleaning service and along with the Janitorial Supervisor are legally responsible for the contract to the university."

Tensions apparently arose between Wedge and Patterson about how closely the activities of the janitorial staff should be monitored. "The Don wanted to have his signature on the cheques issued to janitorial staff after it appeared certain employees had been paid when they hadn't completed the tasks they were supposed to," said Craighead.

"The Don wanted some control over whether someone got paid especially if they did not do their jobs."

Craighead also flatly denies there is any connection between the complaints issued against the House Don and the disciplinary actions taken at Neill House as a result of incidents on January 19 and 20. "They are totally unrelated," Craighead stated.

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