

Tuition dollars and drag queens

By David Edmunds

Special to The Courier-Journal

With college tuition rising as fast as the price of gas, you would think Kentucky's educational bureaucrats would be more careful with how they spend the hard-earned cash of students and taxpayers. The salaries of Kentucky's public university presidents rival those of Fortune 500 CEOs, yet they don't exercise the same fiscal discipline as their corporate counterparts.



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In 12 years, tuition at U of L has tripled, leaving parents and students wondering what it is that costs so much more.

Recently U of L was criticized for paying a consultant \$200,000 to change its slogan from "Dare to be great" to "It's great to be here."

And it isn't just the slogans that are over-priced. It turns out that special interest politics carry a high price tag too.

At the same time U of L was raising tuition and pressuring lawmakers for more Kentucky tax dollars, it announced the brand new Office for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Services, complete with full-time director,

Brian Buford, whose services command a cool \$67,207 annually.

On May 12, U of L announced, "Buford also plans to review employee policies and benefits to make sure they're consistent with the university's diversity mission...Provide coordination and support for existing LGBT groups, such as commonGround."

Does "coordinating and supporting" the political agenda of special interest groups like commonGround really warrant \$67,207 of student and taxpayer money?

While spending time fighting legislators over the constitutionality of domestic partner policies, U of L announced that health insurance costs would rise by over \$4,000,000, or 12.5 percent, this year. While insurance costs are rising everywhere, U of L's 12.5 percent was almost twice that of any other Kentucky university. Can parents expect other state universities to have similar increases if they follow U of L's agenda toward domestic partner plans?

At NKU's board meeting this month, trustees voted for domestic partner benefits while simultaneously raising tuition by 10 percent.

U of L's questionable expenditures are not limited to domestic partner insurance and the LGBT Office. In 2005, activist Carla Wallace donated \$1 million to be matched by the state for

funding U of L's Audre Lorde Chair in Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality. U of L President James Ramsey boasted at the time, "Carla Wallace's generous gift and the state's 'Bucks for Brains' program will enable the University of Louisville to attract top researchers in these areas of scholarship."

So in 2008, what "areas of scholarship" is the state funding with a million dollars of taxpayer-matching money from Bucks for Brains?

According to U of L's Web site, Kaila Story occupies the Audre Lorde Chair and details her areas of research: "Recently, I have been specifically investigating how the black male-bodied Drag Queen's presence within queer 'subcultures' disrupts mainstream notions of what is considered natural and fixed signifiers of black femininity and/or womanhood." (<http://louisville.edu/a-s/ws/kaila.htm>)

Maybe President Ramsey can explain exactly how studying "black male bodied drag queens" moves Kentucky forward.

The next time U of L wants to raise tuition and spend Kentuckians' hard-earned dollars, I suggest borrowing some fiscal restraint from the business world. For their next slogan they can use "Keep Louisville Weird" for free.

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MONDAY
JUNE 2, 2008
A9

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