

Māori Student Success at Unitec at risk

Te Kaunihera Akonga o Wairaka | Unitec Student Council respond to the claim of institutional racism at Unitec.

As the elected voice of Unitec students, the Unitec Student Council (USC) are deeply concerned about the dismantling of Māori leadership at Unitec and its impact on Māori student success. The dismantling of Māori leadership will not provide a safe learning environment for Māori students and their whanau, as Māori.

Irene Farnham, Māori student representative, says “In the absence of strong Māori leadership, Māori student leadership loses confidence in the Institute’s ability to provide equitable access to learning opportunities for Māori students”. Farnham believes that the void of Māori senior leadership may result in the reestablishment of the institutional barriers Māori students typically face in mainstream learning spaces, diminishing their ability to easily learn, live and practice their culture in safe ways.

As a major provider of tertiary education in West Auckland, Unitec plays a key role in Māori communities. Recent events that have seen the uplifting of the photo of Sir Te Ahikaiata John Turei by his whānau from Unitec, comes as a major blow to Māori who have already entrusted Unitec with their whānau. The Unitec Student Council recognises that this is a time of great change for Unitec in joining with MIT, however there is a growing uncertainty and anxiety amongst students as to the direction Unitec are heading. The apparent failure of Unitec’s obligations to Māori and all students, as outlined within Te Noho Kotahitanga, the Unitec Student Charter and Te Tiriti o Waitangi is of grave concern. Furthermore, the lack of genuine consultation and communication between Unitec and students, as major stakeholders of the institute, leave them feeling further marginalised.

At the time of this press release, there has been no formal engagement between student voice and Unitec Exec, nor any communication as to the changes within the leadership team and what this means for students. “These actions have denied all Unitec students their right to be informed about decisions which will impact their education, and their right to consultation”, says USC Student President - Aroha WiKohika Dykes.

The Unitec Student Council are committed to engaging with students as they return to campus to better understand the impacts of these changes, and how to support genuine dialogue between students and Unitec.

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