

CAMPUS

Feminist duo set to perform on Wednesday.

Page 3

A&E

WIIT reviews new Charles Bradley album.

Page 5

SPORTS

Check out photos from the latest track meet.

Page 7

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CAMPUS 2-4
A&E 5
SLIPSTICK 6
SPORTS 7

Undocumented Students and Allies, with media in tow, deliver six demands to President Cramb

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On many college campuses in the United States, rally-centric activism is part of the fabric of student life. Especially at massive state schools, a wide array of political and social groups protest and march to gain attention for the topics they feel deserve administrative action. Informed by tactics and traditions most exemplified by movements of the 1960s (but which date back further,) these demonstrations are often coordinated to achieve maximum visibility, and are often controversial for what some see as unreasonable demands and deadlines, but which others proclaim are necessary pressures in order to create change.

On Thursday, March 3, Undocumented Students and Allies (USA) joined the ranks of campus activists across the country in a modified version of their annual Coming Out of the Shadows event, a three-hour protest that spanned three blocks of campus and involved local news-media, the Office of Marketing and Communications, and eventually President Cramb himself. Orchestrated largely by USA president Egle Malinauskaite, Coming Out of the Shadows was intended to shed light on the unique challenges faced by Illinois Tech's undocumented student population, and in recent years has been used to advocate for the United Minds Inspiring Innovation (UMII) Scholarship Initiative, a proposed merit-based scholarship for select undocumented students that is being put to a referendum question during this Spring's SGA executive board elections. However, this year was very different, taking a much broader scope than previous years' events.

Coming Out of the Shadows began last Thursday at 1 p.m., with a reserved space in the MTCC Welcome Center. A set of chairs was lined up for speakers and members of USA's executive board, and a table nearby

was adorned with all manner of promotional materials in support of the UMII Scholarship Initiative. However, trouble soon began for the group when news organizations arrived at the event's location, a fact that was not communicated beforehand to the office of Marketing and Communications. Within minutes of the event's scheduled start, before any speaker had taken to the mic, media was informed that they could not film or record audio inside the MTCC, since they had not obtained permits to do so. In response, a member of USA announced that the event would be moving outside the building to the sidewalk along State Street, shouting "they are trying to shut us down. They want us to be silent." Later in the day, this situation would be presented from USA's point of view on the Illinois Tech Student Community (ITSC) Facebook group, leading many to believe that the protest was shut down because of its content. While many members of the protest group asserted that Marketing and Communications would not have made the same decision if the topic covered was less controversial, the office maintains that it was simply enforcing university policies about taping news segments in private campus buildings.

Once the group, about thirty strong, moved outside the MTCC with their banners and signs, reporters from the local outposts of Univision, Telemundo, and another TV station set up a media microphone stand for recording and live coverage. In order to be heard above the din of traffic, speakers used a megaphone that would later factor into the second half of Coming Out of the Shadows, a march across campus. From approximately 1:10 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., a wide range of individuals representing the organization outlined their personal grievances with Illinois Tech's administration, broadly focused on the plight of undocumented immigrants who attend school here. Some

spoke in both English and Spanish, a nod to the viewers of the stations covering the rally and to their cultural identities in general. Behind them stood the rally group as a whole, providing a backdrop of slogans scrawled on canvases and cardboard.

Because of their position just outside the sliding door to the MTCC, the speeches of the Coming Out of the Shadows group were hard to ignore. Students moving across campus had to filter around the group to access the MTCC, and many stopped to find out what was going on. In addition, two of the television stations present had blocked one northbound lane of State Street next to the rally's location, causing local traffic to slow to a pace that allowed passing drivers to read participants' signs and assess the situation. If forcing the group out of the building was an act intended to suffocate their cause, as some members of USA claimed, it wasn't very effective. In fact, the outdoor location for the event brought a great deal more attention than their initial spot.

The first hour of the event proceeded similarly to the traditional format of Coming Out of the Shadows in other years, but the group had a big surprise up their sleeve to energize the group for the next phase. The USA Executive Board had drafted a list of six "demands," tentatively unveiled at the previous night's SGA Senate hearing, that they intended to deliver to Illinois Tech's President, Alan Cramb. Expanding their mission wider than ever before, those demands read as follows:

I. We demand a freeze a tuition for the 2017-2018 academic year at the 2016-2017 rate for incoming and current students.

II. We demand the release a public statement from President Alan Cramb recognizing the work of Undocumented Students and Allies in the founding of the scholarship, United Minds Inspiring Innovation (UMII), and the inclusion of

the referendum question pertaining to it in the April 4-6th, 2016 Student Government Association elections.

III. We demand Illinois Institute of Technology creates and enforced comprehensive awareness and inclusion curriculum regarding the undocumented community throughout all campus departments and units, mandatory for all faculty, staff, and administration for Fall 2016. This curriculum must be vetted, maintained, and overseen by a board composed of USA's President and representatives from the Student Access, Success, & Diversity Initiatives at Illinois Tech (SASDI) Office.

IV. We demand that dehumanizing racially-charged slurs, "illegal" and "alien", be listed under examples of "harassment" in the Student Handbook and appropriate disciplinary actions be taken to hold anyone in our community, including students, faculty, and staff, using this form of hate speech accountable.

V. We demand President Alan Cramb joins DePaul University's President, Rev. Dennis Holtschneider, C.M., in publicly supporting the Student ACCESS Bill (SB 2196) for undocumented students in public institutions statewide to be eligible for institutional aid.

VI. We demand by Fall of 2016 that Illinois Institute of Technology uses the direct input of undocumented students to create the position for and hire an Associate Director of Minority Outreach and Undocumented Student Initiatives to work under the supervision of Leroy Kennedy - VP of Community Affairs & Outreach, modeled after the undocumented student liaison position at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Continued on page 2



Photos by Abhinaya Iyer