TSAD members stage sit-in protest at Bendetson

Students demand revision of Tufts' nondiscrimination policy

by WILL KINLAW and JACOB SILBERBERG

A group of 20 Tufts students staged a sit-in at the Admissions Office yesterday, entering the building at 9:00 a.m. and demanding that the administration clarify whether its nondiscrimination policy allows campus groups to discriminate based on ideology. Most of the protesters were members of TSAD — the group formerly known as Tufts Students Against Discrimination. They brought food, water, and sleeping bags into the building as they prepared for a prolonged standoff, and they were still holding their ground as of 3:30 this morning.

The Tufts University Police Department (TUPD) dispatched at least five officers to the scene shortly after the stalemate began, and allowed students to enter and exit the building freely for most of the day. At 3:30 p.m., the administration ordered police to lock the front door of Bendetson. Students were allowed to leave the building if they wished, but no one was permitted entrance. A core group of less than 20 students remained inside the lobby, refusing repeated requests to leave and demanding to meet with administrators.

Dean of Students Bruce Reitman, along with TUPD Captain Mark Keith and Public Safety Director John King, entered Bendetson at noon to negotiate with students. After meeting for several hours in the afternoon and evening, however, no resolution had been reached.

“They’ve been explaining what they see as a necessity for change,” Reitman said as he entered the building for a second round of talks. “It’s just discussion, nothing definitive.”

TSAD, which has been pressuring the administration to clarify its policy since the Tufts Community Union (TCU) Judiciary ruled last month that the University does not prohibit groups from discriminating based on beliefs, had set a Nov. 27 deadline for the University to respond to its demands. After three letters from University President John DiBiaggio affirmed Tufts’ current policy, group leaders said that they had exhausted all attempts to get through to the administration.

“There’s a large loophole in the nondiscrimination policy,” said Mike Lambert, TSAD member and Tufts Transgendered, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Collective (TTLGBC) co-coordinator. “We need the administration to take a stand and reassert that identity and acceptance of identity are the same thing. If they’re going to arrest us, they will have to do it forcefully.”

TSAD chose Bendetson as the site of the protest because it hoped to draw administrative attention by threatening to deter prospective students.

When the office officially closed at 5 p.m., police informed students that they were trespassing in violation of Massachusetts law, and threatened them with arrests if they did not leave the building.

“They issued a warning that we were breaking the law, trespassing, and that we could be removed at any time,” sophomore TSAD member Adam Carlis said. “They said that the arrests would be made by state troopers and Medford city police.”

University President John DiBiaggio issued a press release late in the day that reaffirmed Tufts’ commitment to diversity and nondiscrimination. He promised to meet with the protesters today.

“In spirit and in practice, the University seeks to provide an environment in which our community members are accepted and...