

The “Included” Student

By Aniyah Veal

Grand Opportunities University: where it’s impossible to feel like you’ve left home.

It has a nice ring to it, doesn’t it? I thought it sounded perfect and of course, that’s their goal. No one taking on a new step in life wants to feel unwelcome or even more uncomfortable. Everyone craves some form of a home. All they have to do is use that to their advantage. Lay it on thick and hook as many bright-eyed, hopeful people as they can so that their buildings stay busy and money is made. And who could blame them? You have to ask yourself who can afford to not be making money at every second? In this economy? Absolutely out of the question.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not trying to sound bitter or anything. I can say that I’ve been treated well during my time so far. I’ve had great classes, exceptional professors, cool counselors, fun roommates and awesome clubs. I can check nearly every box on the checklist for the unforgettable college years. Actually, it seemed like everyone around me was just as happy overall. I hadn’t realized that it hadn’t been as easy for some students. I wouldn’t have realized it either if I didn’t have class with him last semester.

I was making my monthly announcement about my next club meeting before the lecture started. It was always easy to tell who was truly interested in being involved or who was staring right through me as I spoke. I remember making eye contact with one of the guys who always sat in the back. I couldn’t place his name, but I thought it began with a S or maybe a C. His face looked curious and he had raised his hand when I asked how many artists were in the room. He was only one of a handful that seemed to not tune me out. As I wrapped up, I mentioned the date

and time for the meeting. In the blink of an eye, he looked down at his desk and slumped forward in his seat. His hand was not among the hands raised to receive a flyer.

The next time I noticed him was near the end of the semester. I was in our main student center, getting warm and eating lunch with friends. We had been there for about fifteen minutes before he walked in. He was wearing this heavy coat, his book bag and tugging this rolling bag behind him. I watched him pick one of the comfy arm chairs, take off his coat and proceed to pull a pillow and blanket from his rolling bag. He fell asleep fast. Noticing that I wasn't listening to them, my friends saw what I was looking at and started to laugh. Someone definitely recorded it for their Snapchat story despite my arguing. After they had their good laugh, they continued talking as if nothing had happened. It didn't take long for them to leave, but I made some excuse to stick around.

About two hours passed before he woke up. I knew it was creepy to wait until he woke up, but I wanted to talk. It was one of those bizarre sights that was sure to linger and stick even longer as you thought about what you wished you had done. I made myself give him ten minutes before walking over to him. I didn't even know what I was going to say. I couldn't lead with "what's up with the substitute bed?" At least I saw recognition in his eyes as I approached him.

"Um, hi. I'm-

"-Tiffany, I know. We have Philosophy together. I'm Adam."

I nodded my head. I stood in front of him, shifting from foot to foot with my eyes flickering between his face and his bags. Immediately, I felt weird about walking over to him and

attempting to ask him something personal. At the risk of looking any stranger than before, I turned away and started to walk away.

“You want to ask about my pillow, I assume? You wouldn’t be the first...” I turned to face him, but said nothing as I felt my face heating up.

“I’m a commuter. I have enough time in between classes where I can sleep, but not enough to go home and come back. It’s not like I have anywhere else to go around here so why not,” he explained himself calmly and shrugged afterwards.

“Do you spend a lot of time here outside of classes? I thought I might see you at one of my club meetings.”

“I don’t have the time. Clubs like to meet in the evening or night. That’s not a problem for people who live on campus, but I don’t have to tell you that.”

“Is only being able to attend classes good enough to you?”

“Honestly, *I feel outside, but I’m not*. I deal with it. It doesn’t matter to anyone anyway. I’m just another name in the system. Not noticed unless it’s time to remove me and my tumbling GPA for sake of reputation... *I sort of feel smuggled in like a secret.*”

I had no suitable reply for Adam. He noticed and shifted the conversation to our class. We continued to chat until we both had to separate and go to our next class.

Later I told my friends about Adam’s words, but they said I was thinking too hard about one guy. I might believe that too if I hadn’t started speaking to other commuters. I almost wish I could say Adam’s position was one lone experience, but it wasn’t. I found out that my home wasn’t everyone’s home. Without a clue, I had been living in a bubble within a bubble.