

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Today (February 7, 2020 at 3:30pm CST), Watkins College of Art students and faculty will visit Belmont University.** This invitational event marks the first of its kind following the Watkins College of Art and Belmont University's "merger" announcement made Tuesday, January 28th. If Watkins President J.Kline, attends today's event, it will be the first time Watkins students have seen Kline since last week's town hall. Watkins students and faculty are scheduled to attend an info session and meal with Belmont students and leadership.

Throughout their visit, Watkins students intend to press hard on Belmont's administration requesting answers to those outlined in the [petition](#) initiated on January 29th along with a growing number of new inquiries and concerns. Both Belmont and Watkins have stonewalled students, faculty and staff from any new information. Soft promises have been made for faculty appointment "consideration" with no mention of Watkins staff. Belmont spokesperson, April Hefner, told the Tennessean that "the school supports students' rights to artistic expression" but immediately noted that they "must align with the university's mission, vision, and values." Hefner's comment further illustrates Belmont's gloss over tactic.

Current Watkins students and faculty have many questions for Belmont including the following:

- The roll-out of this agreement was orchestrated with complete disregard for the students. Our president devoted a half-hour to telling us our lives would fundamentally change. Since this happened, you have ignored us. You all seem to be treating this as a public relations problem while we seem to be an afterthought. What are you going to do to make this right?
- Are you going to change your policies on censorship? How can you say you support the arts when you censor?
- Can we see the agreement between Belmont and Watkins? We need to see the deal.

To date, our petition continues to gain international support with over 4,600 signatures to date.

**Save Watkins** is a collective of Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni of the Watkins College of Art. Our mission is to secure a safe and open environment for Watkins Students to express themselves without fear of being censored. This may manifest as securing the funding to keep the Watkins College of Art open in its current form, changing existing policies at Belmont, or working towards a partnership with a different institution.

We stand united in the following demands:

1. Deliver the written deal discussed between the Board of Trustees of the Watkins College of Art, and the Board of Trustees at Belmont University in writing. We also demand that the minutes to the meetings where these deals were agreed upon must be delivered to us. We have the right to know what was discussed behind closed doors.



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2. Dr. J Kline is to step down as President of Watkins College of Art immediately. Kline's lack of transparency with the Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni regarding the financial situation of the school is grounds for his immediate dismissal. He may also not be offered a role in the transition team if the college is to be absorbed by Belmont. The students shall elect a member of the faculty to represent them throughout this process.
3. The President of Belmont, Dr. Robert Fisher, must make a statement affirming the rights of LGBTQ+ people. Not just at Belmont, but everywhere. Fisher must also put forth a plan of action to ensure the safety of these students at Belmont University.
4. The Board of Trustees must set a time and date for a town hall with the Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni of the Watkins College of Art. At this meeting, they must answer all questions put forth by those in attendance.
5. If the Watkins College of Art is to be absorbed by Belmont University then Belmont University must keep its promise to honor current Watkins student's tuition and their scholarships. This promise, along with the many others that were made to the students, must be delivered in writing ASAP.



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