

April 30, 2012



Via Hand Delivery

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Dear Dr. Price:

This letter presents a summary of facts and issues related to your recent conduct and the University's investigation of student complaints regarding your class(es). It also establishes the requirements for your return to the classroom.

On March 6, 2012, you met with Linda Foulsham and Drs. Folts and Specht (Dean Calamai's designee) to discuss complaints made by student athletes in your class. At that time, you were informed of the complaints and advised not to engage in retaliation against the students. Ms. Foulsham offered to schedule a meeting with you and the students to discuss concerns. During your next class meeting, you showed a documentary film on the pornography industry. Students and parents complained about the manner in which you showed that film which led to the meeting on March 16, 2012, with Drs. Carey and Specht to discuss student complaints regarding your classes and to allow you the opportunity to respond to these complaints (See Attachment 1). At that meeting, you were informed that the University would be investigating all complaints and you were placed on administrative leave with pay to allow the investigation to proceed in an orderly fashion. You were advised that this administrative leave with pay was non-disciplinary (See Attachment 2).

The investigation was completed and findings were transmitted to the Provost on April 26, 2012. A summary of investigative findings will be provided to you. The investigator determined that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that you created a hostile learning environment for a significant number of students in your classes. A number of students reported that your teaching style was confrontational, belittling, angry, critical and destructive of the potential for a valuable education experience. Additionally, many students reported that there was little value in attending class because there were no opportunities to learn fundamental concepts or foundational material as described in the course syllabus.

The investigation did not focus on whether showing a documentary film dealing with the pornography industry was appropriate; this is a determination left to the faculty. Rather, questions centered on the pedagogical framework of the classes. You asserted that you showed the film in response to the instruction that you not retaliate against student athletes who had previously complained about your comments. You stated that you thought it would be better not to speak at all to avoid any perception of retaliation. This rationale appears to be disingenuous. The investigation found that you failed to provide the appropriate teaching strategies that should accompany the use of media dealing with sensitive topics (e.g., disclaimer about the graphic

nature of the film and topics to be covered, contextualizing the material, and teaching difficult topics in a respectful way). You also admitted that you had not seen the film and you were unable to identify which version (edited or unedited) of the film you showed your students. It was determined that by failing to take precautions to ensure that students viewed the film in an informed, safe and trusting environment, you breached your professional and ethical responsibilities to your students.

You have complained that you are being singled out because you have spoken out about issues on campus. This assertion has not been supported and is contradicted by the investigative findings and your own admissions. Moreover, the selective and misleading statements you have made about the process to date are not intellectually honest. In the classroom, students reported you often commented about an allegedly racist environment at Appalachian and about student athletes. Additionally, students stated that you repeatedly criticized students for attending Appalachian. Such comments are patently unacceptable, and support the conclusion that your classroom demeanor has been confrontational, belittling and destructive to students and the student experience. Comments about your personal life and challenges also contributed to a hostile environment. In December 2008, Dean Calamai warned you that your professional communications should be honest and forthright and if they were not, it could be deemed insubordination and subject you to discipline (Attachment 3).

In summary, your conduct in the classroom has led to the creation of a hostile environment for your students. Based on the findings of the investigation, a number of corrective actions must be taken in regard to your classroom approach and pedagogy to ensure a productive learning environment for all of your students. These corrective actions are not serious sanctions, but instead will provide you with an opportunity to address the issues identified in the investigation.

Consistent with the Appalachian State University Faculty Handbook, you are instructed to work with Associate Dean Specht to draft a professional development plan that includes, at a minimum, the following:

- A. Process for midterm and end of semester teacher-course evaluations. These evaluations should be administered by a third party.
- B. Inclusion of best practices for teaching lower division courses, which should include at a minimum:
  1. Attendance policy that requires attendance and specifies the method to take attendance during class.
  2. Multiple assignments that provide students some form of graded feedback prior to the midterm period.
  3. Individual class objectives which allow for framing conversations that deal with sensitive topics.
- C. Participation in professional development education activities:
  1. Dealing with sensitive topics in the classroom
  2. Sensitivity training

- D. Fully developed syllabus which includes disclaimers should controversial materials be used. Further, a planning document should be developed if sensitive materials are to be used. The document should provide the class session objectives, information regarding the steps to be taken to contextualize the information and the debriefing process. **It** is important to note that this requirement is not a ban on use of sensitive materials. Instead, it is a requirement to implement responsible approaches to pedagogy.
- E. Random peer reviews from individuals with knowledge of either the course content or best practices for undergraduate teaching. A mutually-agreed upon observation instrument will be used by each reviewer. These reviews should occur across at least two semesters. If the reviews are positive, decisions can be made about phasing out these activities.

Timelines for completion of the plan should be established as well as predetermined times for evaluation of progress. This plan should be designed to cover a two-year period.

Once developed collaboratively, you will be expected to comply with the conditions of the professional development plan. Noncompliance can lead to serious sanctions, up to and including discharge. We sincerely hope and trust that you will work with your Associate Dean productively to achieve the requirements set forth in this letter.

Sincerely,

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Lori Stewart Gonzalez~.~-----O  
 Provost & Executive Vice Chancellor

Attachments

- 1: Letter (Carey) 3-16-12
- 2: Letter (Gonzalez) 3-20-12
- 3: Letter (Calamai) 12-10-08