
From: Dillon, Robert T
Sent: Sunday, February 28, 2016 5:39 PM
To: Peters, John S; McGee, Brian; SSMfaculty
Cc: Ferguson, Douglas A
Subject: Just Five Theses.

To the Faculty:

This email is a reply to my good friend John Peters, and others who have contacted me both publicly and privately, seeking clarification of my position regarding student learning objectives. Indeed, looking back through the brief and stormy record that has accumulated over the last few weeks, it does appear that my position has become somewhat obscured and fragmented. So here is a collection of my thoughts:

1. It is the business of a University to impart to the rank and file of the men whom it trains the right thought of the world. It is not the business of a University to drill students on bullet-point lists of banalities. We are not the thirteenth grade. Nor is it the business of a University to train students in mundane skill sets fashionable today and obsolete tomorrow. We are not a Tech School. In his email of 21Jan16, my chairman copied for my benefit several sets of student learning objectives from Genetics Labs at other institutions that he deemed "compliant." These included "Manipulate the fruit fly as a genetic research organism, Perform hands-on laboratory skills such as gel electrophoresis, Graph data in excel software." Trivialities such as these are no more the fit objectives of any course I should profess than dumping asphalt on the ground is an objective of road construction. *Hier stehe.*
2. I will not misrepresent Genetics 305L at The College of Charleston by implying otherwise. In the last few days many dear friends have urged me simply to paste my chairman's bullet-point list of trivial banalities into my syllabus and be done with it. Nobody ever even reads student learning objectives, they argue, except apparently chairmen. Why don't I just jump through the hoop, like everybody else? No. I take student learning outcomes seriously. If I were to paste "Graph data in excel software" as an objective into my syllabus, a student might reasonably argue that when he has learned to graph data in excel software, he has earned a grade of A. And Charles Darwin (presumably) fails? I will not lie on my syllabus, *ich kann nicht anders.*
3. I do not deny the importance of course content. If a student (or an accrediting body) is interested, the second page of my Genetics 305L syllabus shows that fruit flies are indeed manipulated in Investigations 3, 4, 5, and 6, and Investigation 9 does indeed involve protein electrophoresis. A great volume of asphalt must (indeed) be dumped upon the ground to build a good road. But the focus must remain on the road.
4. I understand that that these positions fall outside the mainstream thought of my peers. And hence I do not expect to receive positive evaluations from my superiors, nor raises, nor promotions. But I do think that my right to hold these positions is protected by academic freedom. The Administration cannot order me to compromise principles such as I have enumerated here, and then charge me with insubordination when I refuse to abandon them.

5. It is absurd to imagine that the reaccreditation of the entire College of Charleston might be jeopardized by a single set of learning objectives on the syllabus of a single upper-division biology elective, no matter how “noncompliant” they may be. I am appalled at the level to which this controversy has been escalated by my chair, my dean, and my provost, and horrified by the mass hysteria that seems to have gripped this entire campus in recent months over the SACSCOC reaccreditation process.

Gott helfe mir, Amen!

Rob

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