

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. Brian McGee, Provost

From: Dr. Robert T Dillon, Jr., Biology

Re: Are We Student-Centered?

Date: February 24, 2016

By this memo I will endeavor to persuade you that, even if (by your judgement) I am noncompliant with College policy, and even if (by your judgement) I am insubordinate, you should nevertheless drop all charges against me, and allow me to continue teaching Genetics Lab 305L as I have taught it for 34 years, under my syllabus as it is currently written. My argument is this: Think of the students.

Here are the texts of four emails I have received in the last 48 hours:

- Hey Professor Dillon, I'm really sorry to hear that you won't be coming back. Your passion to inspire is what we need at the college. I hope you find a place that lets you do just that. I'll miss your insights. Bao N.
- Hello Dr. Dillon, I enjoyed our time together. I am saddened to lose you as our professor. Darwin week was a pleasure, a true learning experience. Please keep in touch. Alek W.
- Dr. Dillon, Good afternoon. I am sorry to hear that you will no longer be teaching our lab, your bluegrass and social commentary will be missed, at the very least, by me. Thank you for teaching me that Biology is made up of testable models about the natural world. I was wondering if we still needed to bring cultures home this week to release flies, as was planned. Thanks again, and I hope you have a good remainder of the semester. Will K.
- Dr. Dillon, I'm sorry to hear this news. I've attended 3 different colleges, and your lab was one of my favorites! My belief is that faith and science are intertwined... It was so refreshing for once to have an instructor that did not make me feel uncomfortable or "inferior" because I am a Christian. It is sad that a higher institution is acting as a dictator of knowledge instead of a facilitator of knowledge and critical thinking. It is possible to uphold one's own beliefs while respecting others' ideas. Thank you for demonstrating professionalism to this future educator. (Not to mention playing Hank Williams songs for me!) You are in my thoughts and prayers! Lilah M.

My Monday students have progressed six weeks into the semester, with three lab reports in the gradebooks and three (multi-week) experiments ongoing. On Monday afternoon I was able to meet with Dr. Agnes Ayme-Southgate, who was preparing to assume my duties in 30 minutes. My Tuesday and Wednesday students are seven weeks into the semester, with four lab reports in the grade books and three (multi-week) experiments ongoing. I have also been able to meet briefly with Dr. Melissa Scheiber, who assumed my duties in the Tuesday afternoon and Tuesday evening sections yesterday. But even as of today (Wednesday) I have not met the MUSC Postdoc who has been engaged to teach my Wednesday section, nor even do I know his or her name. I cannot so much as transfer grades, much less prepare this (completely naïve) person to teach Genetics Lab 305L at The College of Charleston, now 7 weeks into a 14-week semester.

So Will K. (in the Wednesday section) wondered yesterday “if we still needed to bring cultures home this week to release flies.” He is referring to one of the three ongoing experiments, “Chromosome mapping with a trihybrid cross,” which requires students to transport certain fly cultures home the night before class, and clear them in their own backyards at 2:30 AM, learning much more about science than a simple technique of fly husbandry, I assure you. I apologized to Will K. that I had no answer, and didn’t know where to refer him. I strongly suspect that the chromosome mapping experiment may be ruined for all four sections this week because of the ongoing disruption in instructorship.

I was gratified to read Alek’s characterization of the 16th Annual Darwin Week in Charleston as “a true learning experience.” I saw Alek in the audience at quite a few events during the week of Feb 4 – 14, including the Gage Hall lecture by the prominent historian of science, Dr. Ron Numbers, on the evening of Feb 8. Alek wants to be a dentist, and yet he walked several blocks south of campus in the cold rain to hear about “The Origin of The Controversy” between science and religion. **One could only pray that the faculty at The College of Charleston might love learning as much as young Alek W!**

It should pass without remark, but I shall remark upon it anyway, that I have done nothing. I have not changed the way I teach my class, nor changed the learning outcomes I expect in my students, in 34 years. But suddenly, on January 19, 2016, I was charged with noncompliance. And when I refused to change on January 20, I was charged with insubordination. All I wish to persuade you by the present memo is that we should reset the calendar to January 18, and try to forget that the rancor of the last 36 days ever occurred, for the sake of our students.

Matthew 5:10-12,

