



May 18, 2016

President Glenn F. McConnell
Office of the President
College of Charleston

Dear President McConnell,

The College of Charleston Faculty Grievance Committee (hereafter, “committee”) regrets to inform you that we were unable to resolve a grievance. The following contents summarize the committee’s process, including pertinent exchanges. For more specifics, Dr. Dillon has given me permission to share the following link that contains access to relevant documents:

<http://dillonr.people.cofc.edu/WW/>

The committee received a Notice of Grievance from Dr. Robert Dillon on April 19, 2016, stating (in part),

On March 18, 2016, Provost Brian McGee imposed upon me an eight-count sanction, including suspension without pay for the fall semester 2016. The Provost alleges that the instructional objectives as stated on my Genetics 305L laboratory syllabus are noncompliant with FAM VII.A.2, and that my refusal to change them is insubordinate.

I counter that my instructional objectives, as stated on my syllabus, comply in all respects with College policies as required by the FAM. Nor can I be judged guilty of insubordination for refusing to misrepresent my true teaching objectives. I would request the Provost’s sanctions of 18Mar16 be voided.

The committee deliberated the merits of the complaint and unanimously determined that the grievance was within its purview, acknowledging that it would not address issues of academic freedom and due process as these are within the purview of the Faculty Hearing Committee. The committee had a compromise in mind but wanted to meet with Dr. Dillon and Provost McGee individually to gain more information.

On May 2, 2016, the committee met individually with Dr. Dillon and Provost McGee to gather information and discuss potential ways to resolve the reported grievance. During our meeting with Dr. Dillon, we asked the following questions:

1. “Could you please share with us any in-person interactions relative to this situation that were not included in the electronic files you gave to us?”
2. “What is your position/feeling about some sort of compromise, such as the below, for the lifting of the fall sanctions?” [Keeping the Wilson quotation and adding either directly following or as a footnote or endnote an explanation similar to what Dr. Dillon provided in his letter to Dr. Ferguson and the Review Panel so that the FAM requirement that objectives are stated clearly is unambiguously met¹]
3. “Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?”
4. “Would you like us to mediate a conversation between you and Provost McGee?”

In response to these questions, Dr. Dillon indicated that there were no in-person interactions; he indicated that he may be willing to compromise; he detailed more specifically his grievances; and he indicated that he was not opposed to having a conversation with Provost McGee.

During our meeting with Provost McGee, we asked the following questions:

1. "Are there any circumstances under which you would consider reversing or reducing the sanctions?"
2. "How did you arrive at the sanctions?"

In turn, Provost McGee explained that he would be amenable to revisiting the whole matter related to the grievance if Dr. Dillon would be willing to satisfy the following conditions, which all must be in writing:

1. "The College has an interest in [faculty] following college policies and Dr. Dillon must agree to do so;
2. Agreement that Dr. Dillon will create complete and course-specific learning outcomes and publish these in all future course syllabi, as this is in compliance with FAM requirements. These must be satisfactory to his supervisor; and
3. Dr. Dillon must agree that he was in violation of those policies in the current [Spring 2016] semester."

Provost McGee also provided some information clarifying how the sanctions were determined.

The committee's hope was that a compromise could be met to ameliorate the grievance. Toward that end, our recommendation was that Dr. Dillon consider the conditions set by Provost McGee necessary to revisit the matter that resulted in the "eight-count sanction."

After receiving our recommendation, Dr. Dillon asked, in reference to the potential compromise of keeping the Wilson quotation and adding a footnote for clarity, "As a point of clarification, did the Provost seem willing to consider the compromise your committee suggested?" The committee took this question as a positive sign toward resolution. The committee responded that we were under the impression that something similar to the suggested compromise would be acceptable, but thought it wise to get written confirmation from Dr. Dillon's supervisors (Dean Auerbach and Chair Hillenius) since this was part of the second condition given by Provost McGee.

Dean Auerbach and Chair Hillenius indicated that the suggested compromise needed greater specificity. As such, the committee made the following request and recommendation to Dr. Dillon on May 12, 2016:

Specifically, in an effort to meet the Provost's second condition, we ask that you write up six more specific learning outcomes/objectives related to your content. . . . If your intent is to meet the Provost's three conditions and you are willing to create some more specific outcomes/objectives, we would like to call a meeting with you, your chair, dean, and the Provost with the specific goal of discussing the SLOs that you create prior to the meeting and subsequently amending your syllabus to everyone's satisfaction and to meet FAM requirements. We feel as though meeting with everyone in person is necessary so that all parties are present and can voice how the syllabus must be revised to be deemed satisfactory for meeting the Provost's second condition.

On May 13, 2016, Dr. Dillon responded to the committee's request and recommendation, I do greatly appreciate your efforts to resolve the grievance I filed on 19Apr16. And I was disappointed to learn that the Provost has rejected the compromise your committee

suggested back on 2May16. Given his continued intransigence, I suppose we have no choice but to refer my grievance to The President.

Provost McGee, having been copied on Dr. Dillon's request, sent the committee a memorandum that thanked the committee, indicated being puzzled by the request, but agreed "that a report on an 'unresolved grievance' to the President is appropriate."

The committee offered the following point of clarification to Dr. Dillon, as we thought it may affect his decision, "The Provost did not reject the compromise, rather your chair and dean indicated that it needed greater specificity. ... Please let me know how you want the Committee to proceed." On May 14, 2016, Dr. Dillon responded, "The origin of the intransigence is immaterial. Please forward my grievance to the President."

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Beth Lloyd (chair)
Cliffon Peacock
Doug Walker
Marvin Gonzalez
Sarah Robertson

cc:

Dr. Robert Dillon, Biology Department
Dr. Brian McGee, College of Charleston Provost
Dr. Mike Auerbach, Dean of the School of Math and Science
Dr. Jaap Hillenius, Chair of the Biology Department

ⁱ Potential additional explanation added to the Explicit Learning Outcome:

Explicit Learning Outcome – “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, the thought which it has tested and established, the principles which have stood through the seasons and become at length part of the immemorial wisdom of the race. The object of education is not merely to draw out the powers of the individual mind: it is rather its right object to draw all minds to a proper adjustment to the physical and social world in which they are to have their life and their development: to enlighten, strengthen and make fit. The business of the world is not individual success, but its own betterment, strengthening, and growth in spiritual insight-- 'So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom' is its right prayer and aspiration." Woodrow Wilson, 1896.

In the science departments* of such universities, Wilson’s “right thought” is understood to mean “the scientific method.” Science is the construction of testable hypotheses about the natural world. And (especially in a laboratory) the focus must be on the verb, “to construct.” Note that the verb “to construct” is transitive; something must be constructed. So in Genetics 305L, we [students] construct testable hypotheses about the mechanisms of heredity. Over the course of 14 weeks, students in Genetics 305L are expected to submit 10 lab reports and take two practical quizzes evaluating their ability to construct testable hypotheses about heredity.

*Note that the qualities of “right thought” differ among academic departments. So in science, right thought is rigorous, critical, systematic and precise. In poetry, right thought is creative, sensitive, intuitive and metaphorical. This theme is developed more fully in my teaching philosophy, which I recommend.