

April 12, 2016

Dr. Robert T. Dillon, Jr.  
Biology Department  
College of Charleston

Dear Dr. Dillon,

The College of Charleston Hearing Committee received your Notice of Grievance on Tuesday April 5, 2016. We deliberated the merits of your complaint that there was a violation of your academic freedom on Tuesday April 12, 2016. To avoid any potential prejudice, Dr. Anthony Bishara (a member of an off-campus singing group with you) recused himself and was replaced by Dr. Todd Grantham, one of the alternate members of the committee. Our committee was unanimous in its judgment that your Notice of Grievance does not describe sufficient evidence of a violation of your academic freedom to warrant a hearing on this charge.

The College of Charleston Faculty Administration Manual (hereafter referred to as the FAM) section X.I.2.a.3 requires a Notice of Grievance to contain “a detailed description of evidence tending to support the position of the grievant.” A detailed description of such evidence was not included in the Notice of Grievance and so our committee proceeded based on our general knowledge of the case gained from information you have made public. According to the FAM section VIII.A.2, instructional objectives are required to be clearly stated in writing (presumably in the syllabus). Your instructional objectives in BIOL 305L are not specific to that course. Our committee sees no reason to think that being required by the College to include course specific instructional objectives and student learning outcomes is a violation of your academic freedom. Thus our committee has decided that there is not sufficient evidence to justify holding a hearing to assess the claim that your academic freedom has been violated.

Our committee was concerned that the sanctions imposed on you represent a disproportionate response to your refusal to put course specific instructional objectives on your syllabus. Those sanctions also appear to violate AAUP and College of Charleston FAM (VII. B. 2.) due process guidelines which stipulate that separating a faculty member from ongoing academic responsibilities is only justified if there is a threat of immediate harm. These concerns, taken together, lead our committee to worry that these events create a climate that threatens academic freedom at the College more generally.

The FAM (X.I.2.b) requires the committee to determine whether the nature of the grievance is within the jurisdiction of the Hearing Committee. The By-Laws (Article V) state that our duties include hearing cases of alleged academic freedom. However, the description of hearing committee procedures (FAM X.I.1.d), states that we can hear cases of academic freedom only if they are related to denial of tenure or dismissal of a contract employee. Because these two passages are in conflict, it is not clear whether we have jurisdiction in this case, but the issue of jurisdiction is moot since we do not believe the grievance letter described sufficient evidence to warrant a hearing.

Sincerely,

B. Lee Lindner (chair)

Bob Mignone

Ned Hettinger

Tom Heeney

Todd Grantham

cc: College of Charleston President Glenn McConnell  
College of Charleston Provost Brian McGee  
Dr. Mike Auerbach, Dean of the School of Math and Science  
Dr. Jaap Hillenius, Chair of the Biology Department