



Cornell University

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June 4, 2010

Dear Bill,

I just returned from the Profile in Courage Award ceremony held at the JFK Library on May 24, 2010. It was so refreshing and reinvigorating to be at a place and among people who honored and celebrated people who have the courage to do what is right, just because it is right. The awardees did not use groupthink to first survey the lay of the land to side with the most probable winner; they did not take the easy way; they were not complicit with special interests; they did not put self-interest first; they did not put profits first; they just did what was right because it was right. The faculty at Cornell University must be constantly vigilant if we want to ensure that Cornell stands upright and unwavering in our support for these nonconforming virtues. The integrity of the university demands it.

Standing up for what is right is not easy for us who study the world using reason, because we must overcome the additional burden that we are living in a time in which reason, as defined by Herbert Marcuse (1941), is "*unquestioned conformity to the dictates of efficiency, convenience and profits.*" I ask you, Bill, as Dean of the Faculty, what does CU stand for: "Conformity Unquestioned" or "Courageously Undaunted?"

1. Hierarchical Exclusion or Inclusive Deliberation

The question with which I ask you to charge the Committee for Academic Freedom and Professional Status to deliberate, to debate, and to decide is a question of professional ethics. It is a question of right or wrong. I claim that I was egregiously and unprofessionally wronged by the Biology Curriculum Transition Committee (BCTC) because they worked in an environment of hierarchical exclusion rather than a culture of inclusive deliberation. In perpetrating their neglectful actions against me, the BCTC also egregiously wronged the Cornell University students, particularly those who believe or have come to believe that in today's society, ethics must be a substantial and integral component of a nonmajors biology course. None of these wrongs would have been perpetrated had the Biology Curriculum Transition Committee worked in a culture of inclusive deliberation instead of a culture of hierarchical exclusion. To let these wrongs go unchallenged will erode the rights and responsibility of the Cornell faculty, slight the ethical development of Cornell students, and undermine the teaching of *thatige skepsis*, an active skepticism about and within science.

2. Previous Actions of Faculty Senate Committees

To act upon my belief that decision making regarding the curriculum at Cornell University should be an inclusive deliberative process, not one of based on hierarchical exclusion, on 3/2/10, I sent a letter to you which began with the following paragraph (Appendix 1):

The Biology Curriculum Transition Committee (BCTC) has substantially modified the existing high quality biology curriculum and discontinued existing programs without consulting either the Committee on Academic Programs and Policies (CAPP) or the faculty who created the programs and who are responsible for the character and quality of the courses. I ask that the Committee on Academic Programs and Policies (CAPP) and/or the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Status (AFPS) promptly investigate this matter.

You charged the Committee on Academic Programs and Policies with the task of investigating the issue. On 3/18/10, I wrote to Bill Crepet, the chair of CAPP. The email (Appendix 2) stated:

Dear Bill,

I am wondering what materials would be of use to the members of CAPP that I can give you concerning the substance of Bio G 1110 or the process used to delete Bio G 1110 from the course catalog.

*Thanks,
randy*

On the same day, Bill answered back (Appendix 2):

Randy

I am in the process of discovery right now and will ask you for information where gaps exist or if there is some uncertainty. Thanks for offering. The letter you submitted to CAPP does not specifically include the 110 issue.

Bill

Apparently no gaps existed and there was no uncertainty, because Bill never requested any information from me. Bill later recused himself based on a conflict of interest and the remaining members never requested any data in the form of printed information from me that could be used in a deliberative process. It is not impossible that the conflict of interest precluded a thorough deliberation.

In their letter to me written on 5/7/10 (Appendix 3), the members of CAPP wrote to thank me “for bringing this matter to the CAPP’s attention, as it was clearly our charge and responsibility to review the proposal.” They also wrote that, “We do find that the process leading up to the recommendation to replace BIOG 110 with a new curriculum was conducted with exemplary openness and public solicitation by the UBCTF (in 2007-2008), and that the overall implementation of this plan by the BCTC (active since fall 2008) has also been open, given that its charge is to work with departments on implementational details rather than to rethink the curricular changes proposed by the UBCTF. Thank you for bringing this matter to the CAPP’s attention, as it was clearly our charge and responsibility to review the proposal.”

The sentence beginning with “We so find...” was, in essence, the first statement, presented to me at my hearing. I contend that CAPP could only come to their conclusion from examining insufficient

data. Indeed BCTC did have to “rethink” the conclusions of the task force chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick. The fact that they had to “rethink” issues is documented in an email I got 2/11/10 from Ron Harris-Warrick (Appendix 4):

Hi randy, we did get input from other teachers of Bio 109-110 (I forget at the moment who) as well as students who were taking the class. As you are aware, the current implementation committee did not follow our proposal to eliminate Bio109-110 (in favor of all the courses suggested by Don's committee) but instead to eliminate Bio 101-104. So the situation is completely different from what we originally envisaged. Hope this helps.

Ron

While I brought data in the form of copies of emails that would document an alternate hypothesis that I believe would result in an opposite conclusion, CAPP did not choose to take the written evidence that I brought to the hearing with me. I felt like Officer Opie with the twenty seven 8x10 color glossy photographs with circles and arrows and a paragraph on the back of each one. I believe that the data I had in my possession would most likely would have filled in gaps and introduced uncertainty in the statement in CAPP’s letter quoted above, and in the findings (Appendix 5). Because CAPP did “*not specifically include the 110 issue,*” and as a result CAPP most likely did not have sufficient evidence to make a judgment on the handling of BIO G 1110, I am sure that AFPS committee will *not* be going over the same material.

3. My Action is Based on Principle, Not Self Interest

It is important to realize that I have more concern over the process than over the results. One bad result is just one bad result, but a bad process sets a precedent for many bad results—an unwanted possibility for the processes involved in Reimaging Cornell. To get the best results in terms of curriculum, the process must not be based on hierarchical exclusion, but on open and inclusive deliberation. Here I am going to present evidence exclusively about the process that led to the elimination of BIO G 1110 (= BIO G 110) from the course catalog. I present data that the process was not open, inclusive and deliberative but hierarchically excluding. I want to emphasize however, that my fight is based on principle and not self interest. In fact, after I met with Jan Nyrop on December 15, 2009, Bill Crepet reported that Jan Nyrop said to him, “*Randy has principles.*” Here and now, together, let us not let having principles be considered a quaint but outdated attribute at Cornell.

In order to separate principle from self interest, it is important to document what I knew and when I knew it. As will be documented below, a committee chaired by Don Viands appeared to be concerned with instituting new courses, a committee chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick appeared to be concerned with biology major courses and neither committee appeared to be concerned with Bio G 110 or gathering data from me. However, there must have been a clear and convincing statement to the BCTC since, as documented in an email from Bill Crepet to me on 5/20/10 (Appendix 6), on December 12, 2008, Michael Scanlon, a member of the BCTC, said at a Plant Biology Department Meeting, “*BioG110 is toast.*” After hearing this, I talked with Eric Alani, a member of the BCTC, many, many times. While I can normally talk with Eric Alani, my friend and neighbor, about anything; clearly talking about the work of the BCTC was off limits. I concluded that there was a culture of silence and exclusion in the BCTC. During this time, the course evaluations for BIO G 110 were very good

(Appendix 7), Torrey Jacobs, in the CALS Office of Academic Programs, cannot recall any complaints being made about Bio G 110, and Bill Crepet reassured me that the dean was hearing good things about Bio G 110.

I was brought up with the lesson preached by Martin Niemöller (1941) who, as quoted in the *Congressional Record* (October 14, 1968, page 31,636 as well as in my Plant Cell Biology book), said, “*When Hitler attacked the Jews I was not a Jew, therefore I was not concerned. And when Hitler attacked the Catholics, I was not a Catholic, and therefore, I was not concerned. And when Hitler attacked the unions and the industrialists, I was not a member of the unions and I was not concerned. Then Hitler attacked me and the Protestant church — and there was nobody left to be concerned.*”

In late November 2009 (I think) at 8:30 AM, the Office of Undergraduate Biology hosted a meeting with Ron Hoy in Mann. I could only attend the first part of the meeting, because I had to teach Plant Cell Biology at 9:05 AM. Ron Hoy volunteered nothing about Bio G 1110 while I was at this meeting. Before I had to leave, I said how important the laboratories were for the students and said I would like to discuss this further. He never responded to me. However, I do think he spoke with Liz Balko, the senior lecturer of the course. Somehow Liz Balko was given additional responsibilities for the new classes developed by the BCTC that by necessity reduced the time she spent on Bio G 1110.

Not being sure whether Bio G 1110 was directly targeted by the BCTC, but concerned that the Freshmen Faculty and Student Advisers in Biology, the Introductory Biology Committee of the Office of Undergraduate Biology, the Department of Plant Biology and the Educational Policy Committee of the Biology & Society Program, four integral groups of which I am a member, were not consulted by the BCTC, I authored a resolution to the University Assembly requesting that the “*Biology Curriculum Transition Committee will do everything in its power to make its deliberations transparent and to seek input from the Cornell community. We suggest that Biology Curriculum Transition Committee use as a model the format established by the UA to create a transparent and inclusive process when it undertook a revision of the Campus Code of Conduct by holding public forums and setting up a website that seeks and displays input from the campus community and makes the committee’s deliberations transparent.*”

On December 2, 2010, the University Assembly unanimously passed this resolution (Appendix 8). This is particularly significant since four of the members of the University Assembly are biologists—two being introductory biology teachers and one being a department chair.

On December 15, 2009 at 9AM, I had a meeting with Jan Nyrop. He suggested that it was disingenuous of me to write the resolution for the University Assembly because the process used by BCTC had been so open and transparent. In that meeting, I described to Jan what I considered to be an open, inclusive and deliberative process. I suggested that a dean could begin such a process by saying that any curriculum could be better, and then propose a series of hypotheses, as opposed to directives, which could make the curriculum better. A task force would then cast the widest net possible discussing the proposed changes with the most integral and diverse groups possible, including faculty teaching the courses in question. Then the task force would discuss the merits and demerits of each point brought up in an open and honest discussion and craft a proposal. They would then bring this proposal back to the self-declared most integral groups, carefully explaining the rationale for the proposed curriculum. The task force would then hold large public meetings to ensure that people with different positions

understood the other positions and the compromises that inevitably must be made. *Mutatis mutandis*, there would then be a plebiscite among the faculty involved in the curriculum. A successful committee would recognize the fine and imperfect balance of fighting for what you believe in, not seeing your opponent as an enemy and sharing success with your opponents in a principled compromise. I believe that such a process would ensure a diversity of opinions that would result in the raw materials necessary to forge the best decisions and produce the best final result.

I received an email from Brian Chabot on 12/17/09 (Appendix 9), stating that “*My question is whether Bio 1110 will be taught in the future. It wasn't on a list of courses that Bonnie distributed yesterday. However, Carole Bisogni is thinking that it would be a good option for students interested in human health.*”

On the same day I responded by email (Appendix 9) in a way that captured the essence of my meeting with Jan Nyrop:

I do not know how to answer your question about Bio G 1110 since I can say that I have not been in the loop at all when it comes to the restructuring of the biology curriculum. I wrote a resolution (see attached) that was passed unanimously by the UA. The resolution, in effect, said that there was (and is) a lack of transparency in the process of evaluating and implementing changes in the biology curriculum and that there should have been and should be.

As a member of Biology and Society's EPC, as a member of the OUB Introductory Biology committee, as a member of the Department of Plant Biology and as a Teacher of Bio G 1110, I can state personally that there has been no transparency.

In response to the UA resolution and a request from President Skorton, Jan Nyrop asked me to come to his office. We had a meeting on Tuesday at 9 AM. There he told me that he believes that the process was completely transparent. Ironically, he also told me that Bio G 1110 has been and is under discussion by the transition committee. Personally I think that this is good evidence that the process has NOT been transparent.

I think that Bio G 1110 is a GREAT option for students interested in human health! I hope that the course will continue. I also hope that there will be an open forum so that students, employees and faculty who have an interest in the biology curriculum can present their needs and what they have to offer. Of course I would like the chance to present the course content and philosophy of Bio G 1110.

I am sending this email to the members of the UA who passed the resolution, to President Skorton, and to Jan Nyrop.

On March 25, 2010, President Skorton rejected the University Assembly resolution in an email (Appendix 10) that stated, “*I believe that the Faculty Senate is the appropriate venue to address the curricular issues raised in resolution 11, and the Faculty Senate's Committee on Academic Programs and Policies is currently reviewing the biology curriculum issue raised in resolution 11. I have shared the resolution with the Dean of Faculty, and I expect that the ultimate determination of the Senate will be shared with the Assembly. I understand that the BCTC conducted two public forums that significantly influenced its decision-making and that BCTC also publicized its activities on a publicly*

accessible website as the resolution requested. The website is available here:
<http://www.cals.cornell.edu/cals/faculty-staff/task-forces/undergraduate-biology/meetings.cfm>.”

The University Assembly responded to President Skorton’s response, stating:

President Skorton’s response is INADEQUATE because:

- 1. The University Assembly is the correct venue to address issues of process that affect the curriculum (as opposed to curriculum CONTENT itself) as described in our charter. The UA is unique in being able to fulfill this task in that the UA provides input from a representative body composed of students, employees and faculty WHO have an interest in a given curriculum.*
- 2. Randy Wayne only filed a grievance with the Dean of Faculty in March, 2010 when President Skorton did not respond to the December 2, 2009 UA resolution in a timely manner.*
- 3. The BCTC was A SECRETIVE AND EXCLUDING committee run by Dean Henry; IT IS POSSIBLE THAT even President Skorton was confused by the COMMITTEE’S slight of hand when he provided us with a website as evidence of the openness of the BCTC—A WEBSITE that had nothing to do with the BCTC.*

This response was transmitted to President Skorton by Charlie Walcott, the Chair of the University Assembly, on or about April 17, 2010 so that it could be discussed directly with President Skorton at the April 30, 2010 meeting. Due to many other commitments, at that meeting President Skorton told us that he had been unable to study the question but promised to get back to us in due time. I continue to send him gentle reminders.

4. The Three Task Forces

In June 2006, Dean Susan Henry charged the CALS Life Sciences Distribution Requirement Task Force (Appendix 11), chaired by Don Viands, to “*discuss what we want students to learn. Should a new course be created? Are there existing courses that are more applied that could be used as substitutes for introductory biology?*” This task force was commonly known as the task force that was charged with the non biology majors courses. It would have been the right thing to do for Don Viands to reach out to me if the task force influenced any decisions made about Bio G 1110 (as suggested in an email sent by Jed Sparks to me on 2/10/10). Don Viands never reached out to me. When I asked Don Viands in an email (Appendix 12) on 2/11/10 “*Why did you not choose to have input from me, as an instructor of Bio G 110?*” He answered, “*That’s a good question that has no good answer. My task force probably should have consulted with you and others. But part of our charge from the Dean was not about how the existing introductory biology courses could be revised for the non-life sciences students, but what other courses or new courses could be used for these students. Ron Harris-Warrick’s task force had more of the charge to consider the existing introductory biology courses.*” The task force chaired by Don Viands concluded that, “*non life science students be provided with two options (menus) of courses to fulfill the distribution requirement of six credits of introductory biology. First, students who wish to complete one of the current series of introductory biology should be allowed to do so....*” On 2/11/10, Don Viands still believed that this was a fact and wrote to me in an email (Appendix 13), “*The non-life sciences students may take any of the options of the new types of courses and/or the*

traditional introductory biology courses. In other words, if they wish to take BIOG 109-110 to fulfill that part of the distribution requirement, they still may do so.”

In Fall 2006, Deans Henry and Lepage charged the Undergraduate Biology Curriculum Task Force (Appendix 14), chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick “*to study the teaching of undergraduate biology at Cornell.*” The task force concluded in a twelve-page final Report dated February 6, 2008 that “*For non-scientists (including CALS non-science majors fulfilling a biology requirement), we recommend the development of additional courses that teach biology through a more targeted study of issues important to society. This topic has been the focus of another task force, and we are in agreement with their conclusions.*” In contrast to the conclusions drawn by the task force chaired by Don Viands, the report produced by the task force generally thought to be concerned with the majors biology courses also states, “*Bio109-110 should be phased out as the new courses become available.*” An eighteen-page appendix was issued to the final report on March 1, 2008 (Appendix 15). It restates, “*We support the findings of the CALS Life Sciences Distribution Requirement Task Force. Their major recommendation is to initiate a set of courses teaching biological principles within the context of socially important issues, such as global warming and cognitive science. While we agree that the Viands Task Force provide leadership on this issue, we have the following suggestions.... After the full set of non-scientist courses are developed, it will no longer be necessary to teach Bio 109-110.*”

The task force chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick was commonly known as the task force that was charged with the biology majors courses. This widespread and reasonable perception is confirmed in an email (Appendix 16) Jed Sparks wrote to me on 2/10/10:

Dear Randy,

There have been two task forces. The first, chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick, was tasked to evaluate the majors biology courses and make recommendations to the deans of CALS and A&S. The second, originally chaired by Ron Hoy and later (since December) by Ron and I together was tasked to implement those suggestions of the first task force that were approved by the deans. I was a member of the original task force and the chairs and deans had considerable communications with the instructors of all of the courses within the biology major. At that time, BioG 1109-1110 was part of the deliberations of the task force chaired by Don Viands aimed at defining the life sciences distribution credits. I wasn't part of this task force so I can't speak to if or how they communicated with the instructors of BioG 1109-1110. Last spring, the deans notified Ron Hoy that the BCTC should take responsibility for BioG 1109-1110.

While Jed Sparks wrote that, “*I was a member of the original task force and the chairs and deans had considerable communications with the instructors of all of the courses within the biology major,*” this statement should not go unchallenged since an article in the Cornell Daily Sun on November 2, 2009 entitled, “*Bio Major Removes Intro Course; Two Electives to Take Its Place*” quotes Bob Turgeon, an introductory biology instructor as saying, “*The instructors of the introductory courses, however, did not play a major role during the deliberation process.*” Moreover, the two introductory biology instructors who were also on the University Assembly voted for the resolution concerning the BCTC which contains the quote “*The instructors of the introductory courses, however, did not play a major role during the deliberation process*” as a whereas in the resolution.

The Biology Curriculum Transition Committee was charged in Fall 2008 with implementing the recommendations of the task force chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick. As stated above, the BCTC had to decide what to do with BIO G 1110, since the task force chaired by Don Viands on non major biology courses, and the task force chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick on major biology courses, were not entirely consistent. When I asked Jed Sparks, *“Why did YOU not speak to me about the nature of BIO G 1110? Perhaps you would have found it was worth saving,”* he answered in an email dated 2/10/10 (Appendix 17), *“The answer to why I never personally talked to you about the nature of BioG 1110 is simple. I have never personally been asked to evaluate your course.”* Asked by whom? Who was setting the boundaries of inquiry? The content of the curriculum is the right and responsibility of the faculty.

I assert that a bright, reasonable and interested faculty member could not have known whether the task force chaired by Don Viands or the task force chaired by Ron Harris-Warrick had jurisdiction over Bio G 1110. Moreover, I assert that any task force that has jurisdiction over Bio G 1110 has the professional and ethical obligation to contact the professor teaching Bio G 1110.

Indeed, Jeff Doyle, the Director of the Office of Undergraduate Biology was also out of the loop. On 2/5/10, he sent an email (Appendix 18) to Liz Balko, Harry Greene and me, saying,

I only learned in the last couple of weeks that a decision had been made to end BioG 1109-1110 as we have known it--elimination of "skin-out" material and the lab component. Even that has been a bit uncertain, because although I thought I had it unofficially from highly placed sources, others had heard that the remaining course would be "skin-out". Of course, throughout the entire curriculum revision process, being Director of Undergraduate Biology has not guaranteed that I could learn anything more (or earlier) than the average faculty member might hear, because the process has been deliberately removed from my management, in the interest of obtaining the benefit of fresh perspectives on the issues.

On 2/11/10 Jed Sparks wrote to me in an email (Appendix 19) that *“Non-science majors will all take new distribution courses and **not BioG 1109-1110.**”* I wrote an email (Appendix 19) to Jed Sparks asking for the paper trail that led to this decision so that I could understand the thinking that went into the decision:

Dear Jed,

*Perhaps I would understand better if any one of the committees contacted me. Your l.) states, “Non-science majors will all take new distribution courses and **not BioG 1109-1110.**” I am looking for the paper trail which would document where this sentiment came from.*

*thanks,
randy*

Jed Sparks responded in an email (Appendix 19) that *“I agree you should have been contacted by both of those committees. The sentiment of putting the word 'not' into that sentence is purely me while writing. I have never read this exact sentiment anywhere.”*

Preceding this exchange between Jed Sparks and me, I tried to communicate with the deans. On 1/29/10, I wrote an email (Appendix 20) to Dean Susan Henry and Dean Lepage,

Dear Deans Henry and Lepage,

I read the following in the Strategic plan:

Objective 5: Foster an exciting intellectual environment through more dialogue and engagement.

[Rationale: The academic/intellectual environment is critical to the attractiveness of Cornell and to the retention of faculty. A negative department culture is commonly mentioned in exit interviews, and, as one example of impact, it is a key factor in retaining women on the faculty.]

In light of this goal, I would like to meet with you concerning the biology curriculum. If you would like dialogue and engagement with others interested in the biology curriculum, it could be an open meeting.

*Thank you,
Randy Wayne*

On 2/2/10, I received the following email (Appendix 20):

Dear Professor Wayne,

Given both Dean Lepage (who is out of town for the remainder of this week) and Dean Henry's travel schedules over the Spring semester they have asked me to write to you to tell you that they simply do not have time to meet with you anytime in the near future regarding this issue. They have suggested that you consult with members of the curriculum committee, including Ron Hoy, it's chair, with your concerns. If you feel that you need to communicate with the Deans, you may do so in a letter.

Best,
Terry

On February 2, 2010, I wrote an email (Appendix 21) to Ron Hoy,

Dear Ron,

I would like to explore what I consider to be the lack of transparency of the BCTC, understand your personal thoughts on the issues, and share mine. Would you like to meet in order for us to understand where each of us is coming from?

*Thanks,
randy*

To reiterate the paucity of open and effective communication between the BCTC and me, in Appendix 22, you can find a series of emails between Ron Hoy and me. On 4/24/10, I sent an email (Appendix 23) to Tom Cleland, a member of CAPP, requesting him to get a copy of the original email

Ron Hoy said he sent to me for my personal record and to confirm one of our stories. I never received confirmation that the email was sent.

On May 10, 2010, at the suggestion of President Skorton, I wrote again to the two deans (Appendix 24):

Dear Deans Henry and Lepage,

I believe that Bio G 1110 was deleted from the course roster in an unfair and unprofessional manner. You wrote to me on February 2nd that you did not have time to discuss the issue. I still would like to discuss with you the process that resulted in Bio G 1110 being deleted from the course roster. I hope that you can find a time that is convenient for you.

*Thank you,
Randy Wayne*

On 5/16/10, I got the following answer (Appendix 24),

Dear Prof. Wayne,

The restructuring of intro bio has been extensively analyzed over the past two years by two committees, with very substantial input from colleges, departments and faculty. I gather from your email that you are not happy with the outcome. In Feb you asked for a meeting. Our suggestion then was that you speak with the committee in charge of implementation, and, if you still felt you needed to communicate with a dean, that you send Susan and me a letter detailing what your concerns are. That remains our suggestion. (I am responding for Susan Henry, as well.)

*Sincerely,
Peter Lepage*

On 5/18/10 I sent this email (Appendix 25) and did not receive a response:

Dear Dean Lepage,

Although it is true that I am not happy with the outcome, it is even truer that I am not happy with the process. I asked for a meeting with you before there were any known outcomes. I would still like to discuss the process.

*Thank you,
Randy*

To this day, I have not discovered the paper trail and time line that describes 1) the process of data gathering concerning Bio G 1110; 2) which data were analyzed to determine that Bio G 1110 should be eliminated; 3) how the data were analyzed and by whom; and 4) who was responsible for deciding that Bio G 1110 would be eliminated. Without such a paper trail and time line, the possibility that the decision was arbitrary and capricious cannot be eliminated.

On 2/3/10, I received the following email (Appendix 26) letting me know that Bio G 1110 had in fact been deleted from the course catalog:

----- Original Message -----
Subject: FW: Deletions
From: "Shawna Lee Lockwood" <s1133@cornell.edu>
Date: Wed, February 3, 2010 9:00 am
To: "Elizabeth A Balko" <eab74@cornell.edu>
"Louise S Lattin" <lsg6@cornell.edu>
Cc: "Torrey Kinsley Jacobs" <tkj8@cornell.edu>
"Bonnie E Comella" <bec3@cornell.edu>

Hi Liz and Louise - I received this email from Undergraduate Biology today regarding the 2010-2011 Courses of Study Catalog.

Thanks, Shawna

Shawna Lockwood
s1133@cornell.edu
Associate Director, CALS Registrar's Office 140 Roberts Hall Cornell University Ithaca, NY 14853
Phone: 607.255.2017 | fax: 607.254.4613

-----Original Message-----
From: Linda Capogrossi [mailto:ldc3@cornell.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, February 03, 2010 8:01 AM
To: Ann M Gantner; Shawna Lee Lockwood
Subject: Deletions

Hi,

The following course are definitely being deleted from the catalog. I just got an email from Jed Sparks.

BioG 1009
B ioG1010
BioG 1101
BioG 1102
BioG 1103
BioG 1104
BioG 1109
BioG 1110 (also remove the supplemental course).

Ann, I will do paperwork to inactivate these course.

Linda

Liz Balko PhD
Senior Lecturer

Director BioG 1109 & BioG 1110
MG 15 Stimson Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853-7101

Office: 607-255-5745
FAX: 607-255-0470
Email: eab74@cornell.edu

Soon after, Bill Crepet came to my laboratory to tell me in person.

I argue that Dean Susan Henry set up three committees and that it is possible that she was incompetent to coordinate the three of them with the result that Bio G 1110, which serves 300 non biology majors, fell through the cracks. Alternatively, it is possible that Dean Susan Henry created an unprofessional and unethical environment in which the three task forces worked. By setting up three task forces composed of faculty, and excluding the faculty who taught introductory biology courses, Dean Susan Henry could get her arbitrary and capricious agenda implemented by faculty while having plausible deniability that it was an administrative action.

This second possibility reminds me of a story by Charles Babbage (1864), the inventor of the calculating machine. He wrote in chapter XXI of *“Passages from the Life of a Philosopher”* how a questionable course of action can get through a committee without anyone taking responsibility. He wrote, *“Occasionally a few simply honest men are found upon committees. These are useful as adjuncts to give a kind of high moral character to the cause; but the rest of the committee generally think them bores, and when they differ upon any point from the worldly members, it is invariably whispered that they are crotchety bores.”*

*When any peculiarly delicate question arises, it is sometimes important to eliminate one or more of them temporarily from the **real** committee of management. This is accomplished (as in graver matters) by sending him on an embassy, usually to one of the adepts, with a confidential mission on a subject represented to him as of great importance. The adept respectfully asks for his view of the subject, rather opposes it, but not too strongly; is at last convinced, and ultimately entirely adopts it. The adept then enters upon the honest simpleton’s crochet, trots it out in the most indulgent manner, and at length sends him back, having done the double service of withdrawing him from consultation at which he may have impeded the good cause, and also of enabling him at any future time to declare truly, if necessary, that he never was present at any meeting at which even a questionable course had been proposed.”*

5. Academic Freedom

Since there is no clear statement why Bio G 1110 was eliminated from the course catalog, the possibility remains that it was eliminated because of the way I taught the students to think skeptically about scientific and medical issues. It is possible that the soapbox upon which I stood in front of hundreds of students was removed because I teach my students to be thoughtful and have an active skepticism about the popular and lucrative trends in science and medicine, such as genetic testing for athletic performance and bipolar disorder. Indeed, I teach them, in the words of Ruth Hubbard (1997) *“to regard a scientist’s or physician’s recommendations as **skeptically** as we do those of other kinds of*

salespeople, but we need to do just that. To keep control of this tangled situation, we must learn what questions to ask, and we must not accept that the answers are too complicated for us to understand. We need to be sufficiently well informed to be able to evaluate critically what the ‘experts’ tell us, so that we can make our own judgments about what tests and what information are likely to benefit us.” It is not impossible that Bio G 1110 has paid a price for my way of thinking and teaching.

6. Using the Golden Rule

We can define what is right using the Golden Rule. I believe that using this ethical standard every faculty member would agree that if his or her course was going to be eliminated from the curriculum, he or she should be involved in the decision. I am not saying that he or she should have veto power, but he or she should be integrally involved in the process. The decision making process should be more inclusive and deliberative and less excluding and hierarchical.

7. The Right Way is probably the Best Way

Why do we have ethics? Probably, in the long run, doing what is right results in doing what is best. On the other hand, doing what is expedient usually results in unintended and unwanted consequences. Here we can look to how Richard Nixon’s re-election campaign hurt the trust American people have in government; we can look to how the deceitful mismanagement of Enron by the “Smartest Guys in the Room” hurt the security of retirees who put their trust in Enron; we can look to how the “Whiz Kids” at the Goldman Sachs Group Inc. hurt investing in a long-term sustainable future by turning long-term investment into short-term speculation tantamount to gambling; and we can look at how British Petroleum hurt the planet by taking the easy road when it came to environmental safeguards pertaining to deep sea oil wells. To be sure, there are examples, where being expedient has led to the best outcome. Nevertheless, it is our duty as Cornell faculty to do the right thing first. I suggest that the open process I described to Jan Nyrop is the right means to achieve the best ends.

8. Unintended Consequences

As a result of an arbitrary and capricious decision made in top down or perhaps in tomorrow’s jargon “*top kill*” manner, to segregate non life science majors from non biology life science majors, Cornell University has lost an innovative, unique and relevant survey course for all non biology majors, whether they majored in Agricultural Economics and Management, English, Natural Resources, Art, Engineering, Human Development, Policy Analysis and Management, Communication, or any other major. In this course, students received a firm foundation in biological principles, learned how scientists discover new phenomena, learned how to apply mathematical and physical techniques in order to understand biological processes and practiced making moral decisions relating to biology that we face in our everyday life. A well-organized and well-taught course aimed at such a diverse audience builds upon the diversity of the students and brings out the best in almost every student. This is especially true when the biology is presented in the context of the student’s lives and intimately woven with ethics, art, history, literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, music, government, philosophy and the meaning of life. (See Bio G 1110 website on Blackboard).

The new survey course for non biology life science majors, designed by the BCTC, will be taught by Michael Scanlon. After Bio G 1110 was officially eliminated from the course catalog, Michael

Scanlon asked if I would teach the course BCTC designed with him. I was not interested in teaching a watered down version of a biology majors course designed by the BCTC (instead of the cancelled course that was meaningful to all non biology majors). I believe that, in this situation, Michael Scanlon may have had a conflict of interest that would not have been possible had the BCTC been open, inclusive and deliberative as opposed to excluding and hierarchical.

Last week, my colleague Karl Niklas discovered that someone decided that his Introductory Botany class could either fulfill a requirement for non life science majors or non biology life science majors, but not both. This arbitrary and capricious restriction, made by a hierarchical and excluding group, without consultation with Karl, did not recognize that a good teacher can teach to multiple and diverse audiences at the same time to the benefit of all. At a faculty meeting last week, Karl Niklas asked if his paleobotany course could continue to serve as an alternative to the evolution course. Mike Scanlon, a member of BCTC, said it could not. Karl Niklas had never been consulted. This is further evidence that the decision making process was hierarchically, excluding, and not open and deliberative. On 5/28/10, I emailed Bill Crepet, who co-teaches the paleobotany course with Karl to see if he had ever been consulted, but I have not heard back from him yet.

8. Remedies

Should AFPS find that the process used by the BCTC was not inclusive in terms of Bio G 1110 but rather excluding and hierarchical, and that my grievance is valid, I suggest the following remedies:

- A. Recommend that, in the future, any process involved in changing the curriculum be open, inclusive, and deliberative as opposed to excluding and hierarchical, and, based on the Golden Rule.
- B. Since it is a special concern of the Committee on Academic Freedom and Professional Status (AFPS) to ensure that teaching and learning at Cornell University is carried on freely and without disruption, interference and intimidation, admonish BCTC for not being inclusive concerning Bio G 1110.
- C. Recommend, in the future, that every faculty committee has a member who will, if necessary, take on the role of whistleblower.
- D. Recommend the relevant committees, chairs, deans, etc. reinstate Bio G 1110 in the course catalog.

Thank you for considering this petition. I would be happy to provide any additional information you request.

Sincerely,

Randy Wayne