

Lyman, Faculty Senate Address “Dangerous Faculty” *New Report Includes Transcript from Faculty Senate Meeting*

The situation involving political science professor Kate Greene’s [suspension from teaching](#) her Supreme Court and Civil Liberties course was discussed at the 6-May-2011 USM Faculty Senate meeting. The [conversation](#) mainly involved USM provost Robert Lyman, Faculty Senate president Anita Davis, and Faculty Senators Stanley Hauer, Timothy Rehner, David Beckett, and Andrew Haley, though there is little doubt that other senators in attendance were paying close attention to what was said. A transcript of that discussion appears below, beginning near the end of Lyman’s traditional monthly presentation to the group.

Lyman – The last thing I want to do is . . . I know you all are considering . . . I guess, are you considering a resolution? Someone sent me a copy of a draft of a resolution that you are considering.

Davis – We have some recommendations . . . we are about to . . .

Lyman – Need for the development of a student-faculty classroom conduct policy and processes . . .

Davis – That’s ‘Academic Governance’ . . . It’s coming up. They have a full report on that.

Lyman – Okay. Well, I just want to say I am completely in support of that . . . uhm . . . of the development of such a policy. If you look at what we have, we currently have at least three different grievance policies. But, you know grievance is a reaction to an action, and we don’t have anything guiding the initial action. And, I think it would be a terrific thing if we could get . . . and the draft resolution that I read said ‘get all the stakeholders involved,’ and I think that’s true. We need to get the students, the faculty, HR people and the legal people together and come up with some clear-headed set of guidelines in how to approach breakdowns in the orderly classroom process. I think such a policy probably needs to recognize sometimes the need for an immediate action – a ‘time-out’ if you will – but then include some steps after that . . . after that’s taken. And, uhm, I just want to say how supportive I was of that, and answer any questions ya’ll might have.

Davis – We’ll let you know how that goes in committee.

Lyman – Okay.

Davis – Uh, we need to move forward.

Lyman – Let me, let me get Tim and Stan’s questions . . .

Davis – Quickly, please.

Hauer – How’s your house?

Lyman – Uh, my house is okay, my neighborhood is devastated. My neighborhood looks like Katrina, uh after Katrina. There are no trees in it, and there’s big piles of rubble lining the streets.

Hauer – Well, we heard talk about after you got up there, it was worse than you thought.

Lyman – Well, the neighborhood was worse, but the house was fine. I had a wall around the backyard, and it’s gone. And . . . some broken windows and doors, but otherwise the house . . . the house is livable. Tim.

Rehner – Back to the suspension thing, ‘cause I think the student piece is one. But, I think the concern that I have is more about just the protocol or the process for dealing with the faculty members . . .

Lyman – I agree.

Davis – And that's to be discussed in committee.

Rehner – But I want to talk to the Provost about it . . .

Beckett – Yes, we want to hear from the Provost about things . . .

Davis – Well, go ahead, but we've got to be out of here at 4:30 . . .

Rehner – My concern is that . . . uhm . . . the reputation of faculty is directly affected by . . . uhm . . . fast action, and concern then about the steps taken to protect the faculty member. We've got issues with students, but my concern is really, at least from the perspective of the Senate, about how to protect the faculty – ah, yes from students, but yes from actions on the part of the administration that might be too hasty for, at least from the rumors I'm hearing, and some comment from the person that was affected. You know, recommendations that they had to have a psychiatric evaluation before they come back, seems . . . seems *way* beyond the scope of a suspension.

Lyman – Well, let me say this, that it's not obviously a standard recommendation. One . . . one . . . And, you know I'm hampered, I can't talk about this, but one would think there might be factors that would've made that seem like a reasonable action.

Hauer – I need to speak up. The student involved is my advisee. And, the student came to me first. I called the chair, and then the Dean, and then we went to the Provost. The actions in that classroom, to a very mild-mannered and dutifully behaved student, were beyond egregious . . . So deeply offensive that I can't repeat them. Profoundly egregious.

Beckett – Well, we've heard other versions. We've talked to students in the class, and his actions were pretty egregious, to use . . .

Lyman – And, and, and let me say this, again not able to comment on any of this. If you've got an out of control situation, and many of you have kids, what do you do? You time 'em out. You get 'em apart. That was the immediate action that was taken. There was a rationale, right or wrong, for some of the other suggestions. Uh, and bear in mind, we haven't talked about any of this. The administration hasn't said a word. Anything anybody has heard . . . what you have just said . . . anything else has not come from us. We have . . . we have tried to protect everyone's reputation in this – it's just 'people talk,' including the people involved on both sides of this episode.

Hauer – Including neither of whom went to the press.

Lyman – Okay, but others who they talked to evidently did. We haven't said a word to damage anybody's reputation. What we did is, we said 'break this up, and let's figure out what's going on.' As part of figuring that out, there were certain actions that seemed reasonable in terms of further data gathering. We subsequently have reviewed situations, revised some of those actions . . . uh, and that's where we are . . . you know. I don't think this thing is any kind of Machiavellian plot. I really don't. It's an attempt to take a *messy* . . . poorly informed situation and make some sense out of it, looking at the rights of everybody involved. Andrew.

Haley – Without speaking to specific events, do you feel that the guidelines that exist give you the flexibility and the . . . as well as the guidance you need to deal with issues where there's a student complaint about faculty?

Lyman – I would say 'no,' and I'd say that in two areas. One, there are no guidelines for initial actions. So . . . so you just make those up. The second is, when we got into this, the first thing that we did was said, 'okay, what's the grievance procedure?' We came up with three of 'em. You know, there's one in the *Employee Handbook*, one in the *Faculty Handbook*, and one in . . . out of Becky Woodrick's office, uhm, none of which seemed applicable. I mean, perhaps even Dave Beckett, with pride of authorship, would . . . would admit that the one in the *Faculty Handbook* is more set up when somebody has a dispute with their chair over their class assignment, or their annual evaluation. It's just not set up for this kind of thing, so I would say 'no,' the procedures seem to me to be sorely lacking. I would say, any procedures that . . . that this group comes up with have to allow for some immediacy of action if there . . . and, and

you know let's not restrict ourselves to this particular incident. You know, others include threats of violence. You know, you've gotta take some immediate action there. Others include issues of . . . of . . . of . . . that could include issues of substance abuse, issues of mental illness, issues of incapacity of a physical nature. You've gotta have the flexibility to take actions for those, and to me the key is – do something right away, and then . . . and then have a process, an orderly process to sort it out as quickly as you can. And, I would welcome a process that allowed us to do that.

Davis – It will come up in committee again.

Lyman – Okay. Thank ya'll.

Davis – Thank you.

The discussion above is likely to generate substantial discussion across the USM campuses and beyond. Some intriguing, and perhaps even troubling things were said by some of those involved. Look for additional reports from USMNEWS.net on this particularly important issue.