

OPEN LETTER TO DR. LINDA WILD FROM IOWA FACULTY EXPRESSING
CONCERN ABOUT ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT SOUTHWESTERN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

Dr. Linda Wild
Vice President of Instruction
Southwestern Community College
Administrative Center
1501 West Townline Street
Creston , IA 50801
Phone#: 641-782-1406
Fax #: 641-782-3312
800 #: 800-247-4023
wild@swccowa.edu

Dear Dr. Wild,

As faculty members of institutions of higher learning in Iowa, we are distressed to hear the reports of the dismissal of Mr. Steve Bitterman from Southwestern Community College.

If he was fired because he expressed views that offended the religious sensibilities of some of his students, as he claims, this raises concerns among the faculty about the violation of Mr. Bitterman's academic freedom.

If he was fired because of student complaints about classroom interactions with students, this raises concerns among faculty regarding due process. Dismissal because of student complaints about teaching style seems unusually harsh and we question whether this was the only recourse available.

According to his own version, he was dismissed by you over the phone, and without any preceding meeting to see if issues related to his teaching could be resolved. Adjunct faculty are especially vulnerable in this regard, and we are especially concerned that colleagues holding these positions are treated in a fair manner.

Regarding the first, academic freedom concern, we request a clarification on the following points:

-Does expressing the view that certain events and phenomena related in the Bible are unhistorical or mythical constitute a cause for dismissal at your institution?

-Is it the position of your institution that the scientific theory of evolution, which may offend the beliefs of Christians, Jews, and Muslims who interpret Genesis 1-2 literally, should be taught at your institution despite the fact that it denies that the earth and human beings originated in the manner literally depicted in Genesis?

These questions are important to all of us who do teach religious studies and other controversial subjects in public institutions, where we always will encounter persons who do not agree with a secular historical or scientific view of their religious beliefs.

We hope that you see your role as protecting the academic integrity of faculty and researchers even when they express views that are opposed to those of certain religious groups. We also encourage you to reconsider what appears to be precipitous treatment of Mr. Bitterman, and resolve more favorably a situation that appears to have generated much negative publicity.

We thank you for your attention,

Dr. Hector Avalos, Ph.D.
Professor of Religious Studies,
Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies,
Iowa State University

Dr. Paul E. Bartelt, Ph.D.
Professor of Biology
Department of Biology
Waldorf College

Dr. Warren Blumenfeld, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor of Curriculum Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Iowa State University

Dr. Cinzia Cervato, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Geological Sciences
Department of Geological and Atmospheric Sciences
Iowa State University

Dr. William W. Clohesy, Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
University of Northern Iowa

Dr. Jeffrey Denburg, Ph.D.
Professor, Department of Biological Sciences
University of Iowa

Dr. Joseph Frankel, Ph.D.
Professor, Dept. of Biological Sciences
University of Iowa

Dr. Heimir Geirsson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Iowa State University

Jack Gilmore
Geologist II, Iowa Department of Natural Resources,
Iowa Geological Survey
Iowa City, IA 52240

Dr. David M. Gradwohl, Ph.D
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology
Iowa State University

Dr. Matthew G. Hill, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Department of Anthropology
Iowa State University

Dr. Brian C. Jones, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Religion
Wartburg College

Thomas W. Lackner
Instructor in Biology
Coe College
Cedar Rapids IA 52402

Dr. John M. Logsdon, Jr., Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Director, Roy J. Carver Center for Comparative Genomics
Department of Biological Sciences
University of Iowa

Dr. Erik Olson, Ph.D.
Professor of Chemistry
Upper Iowa University

Dr. Jerome P. Soneson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Religion and Humanities
Director of the Humanities Major
Department of Philosophy and Religion
University of Northern Iowa

Dr. Tara C. Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Epidemiology
College of Public Health
University of Iowa