

Executive Summary of Inquiry

Great Religions of the World Classroom Incidents

January 19, 2012

This inquiry report combines five student complaints related to Philosophy 1304, Great Religions of the World, taught by Mr. Paul Derengowski, part-time instructor (adjunct faculty), at the Southeast Campus during the fall 2011 semester. This report also addresses Mr. Derengowski's complaint related to his resignation. Part I of this Inquiry reviews complaints by two Muslim students who reported religious discrimination and harassment by creating a hostile learning environment in violation of TCC policies. In addition, Part I of this inquiry reviews Mr. Derengowski's complaint that he resigned under duress. Part II reviews three student complaints against the two Muslim students for disruptive behavior, defaming the instructor, and TCC administrators for failing to act.

Part I of Inquiry

Complaints by Two Students against Mr. Derengowski

Allegations: Two Muslim students, Student A and Student B, complained to TCC officials about Mr. Derengowski, instructor of Great Religions of the World class. On November 15, 2011, Student A called the Office of Human Resources and stated she was calling for herself and on behalf of Mr. Student B to report that Mr. Derengowski was teaching their religion of Islam in a very biased and hateful manner and that Student B had spoken out in class about how Mr. Derengowski was teaching, stating that Mr. Derengowski was making statements about Islam that were wrong and out of context. Student B stated that Mr. Derengowski was slandering the Islamic religion and making many ugly statements about it instead of teaching the actual religion. She stated she and Student B felt discriminated against and that they had departed class early because they did not want to continue to hear Mr. Derengowski slandering of their religious beliefs. The two students, Student B and Student A, also complained to the Southeast Campus administrators, making similar allegations.

Student A said she and Student B felt that Mr. Derengowski had created an inappropriate learning environment filled with many "misstatements and lies" about the Islamic religion and that he also posts "bad and ugly" things on his personal website that are "untrue and very misleading" about the Muslim community including referring to her religion as a "cult." Student A stated that she and Student B were requesting that the College review Mr. Derengowski's teaching presentations in order to put an end to all the "slandorous and untrue comments" he makes in class about their religion. (Exhibit 1)

Issues Reviewed:

- Did Mr. Derengowski violate FDE (LOCAL and LEGAL) policies (Exhibit 2) by creating a hostile learning environment in the classroom for the two students based on religion?
- Did Mr. Derengowski violate FJ LOCAL, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, (FERPA) (Exhibit 3) by releasing names of at least two students enrolled in his class and naming them on his website after his resignation?
- Did Mr. Derengowski resign under duress as he alleged?
- Did Mr. Derengowski's behavior and conduct in the classroom violate DH LOCAL, Tarrant County College's Employee Code of Professional Ethics? (Exhibit 4)

Background Information: On November 15, 2011, Human Resources staff contacted Dr. Coan, Vice President of Academic Affairs, at the Southeast Campus to advise her of the complaints by the two students. Next, Dr. Coan asked to meet with Mr. Derengowski the evening of November 15 at approximately 5:00 pm, two hours before the class was scheduled to begin. The individuals at the meeting were Dr. Barbara Coan, Mr. Munoz, Divisional Dean, and Ms. Sharon Wettengel, Department Chair. The purpose of the meeting was to inform him of the student complaints. While meeting with him, she also discussed the police report he filed related to two Muslim students on November 8. Mr. Derengowski was asked if he felt he or any of his students were in any danger since he had filed a police report about the two Muslim students alleged behavior and leaving his class early. He stated, "No," that he just wanted others to be aware that he felt the students had acted improperly by leaving early. (Exhibit 5)

During the November 15, 5:00 pm meeting it was agreed that Mr. Derengowski would teach the class, make sure the students were prepared to continue the class, and arrange a meeting with the two students who had allegedly disrupted class. The meeting lasted approximately 45 minutes. He along with the campus administrators were to meet with the two students. At this meeting, it would be determined what, if any, action would be taken against the students. Dr. Derengowski was asked to use the approved textbook in his class as required by the District Master Syllabus. His Instructional Course Requirements (ICR) listed his personal web site as required readings for the remainder of the course from November 15 to the end of the fall semester. Rather than teach from the required textbook, his ICR indicated his students were required to use his personal web site for the remainder of the semester. (Exhibit 6)

After the 5:00 pm meeting ended, Mr. Derengowski went to the break room. After a few minutes, Mr. Munoz and Ms. Wettengel went to the break room and it was then that Mr. Derengowski suggested to Mr. Munoz and Ms. Wettengel that the class be canceled that night. Mr. Munoz and Ms. Wettengel agreed that the class should be canceled due to the uncertainty of the situation. Mr. Derengowski suggested earlier that the two students be expelled from his

class and be given an F for the class grade. He also suggested that another instructor take over his class for the remainder of the semester. Mr. Derengowski, The administrators and instructor agreed that they would consult the next day, after they met with the two students. Then Mr. Munoz and Ms. Wettengel left the meeting and walked toward her office. Mr. Derengowski caught up with Mr. Munoz and Ms. Wettengel in the hallway outside of Mrs. Wettengel's office said that he decided to resign instead. He was not asked, either directly or indirectly, to resign but did so voluntarily on the evening of November 15. (Exhibit 7)

Following Mr. Derengowski's announcement of his resignation, Dean Munoz met with the class the evening of November 15 and advised the students they should read their assignments and be prepared for the next class session which would meet as scheduled. No other information was given to the students at that time.

According to Mr. Derengowski's website, his resignation was not voluntary, but was submitted under duress. On January 10, 2012, Mr. Derengowski sent an email to the Human Resources staff requesting that his reasons for his resignation be placed in his file. His email states,

"that, first of all, it was never my intent to resign in the first place, but Tarrant County College administrators (1) failed to reprimand or expel two Muslim students when they assaulted me both verbally and in writing, (2) failed to reprimand or expel the same two Muslim students for disrupting the class taught on November 8, (3) terminated my pre-approved syllabus for arbitrary reasons, leaving me with no reasonable direction to take the World Religions class, and (4) prohibited my freedom to express myself as a professor."

The following day, an email by the Office of Human Resources was sent to Mr. Derengowski and requested him to provide specifics on each of the four points made regarding his resignation. Mr. Derengowski has not responded to TCC's request.

Upon Mr. Derengowski's resignation, TCC administrators took immediate action and assigned another adjunct faculty member to the class, Mr. Mark Austin. Mr. Austin began teaching the next scheduled class period, November 17. Ms. Wettengel introduced Mr. Austin to the class and responded to questions regarding Mr. Derengowski, who had emailed the students informing them of his situation. The Southeast Campus administrators acted to ensure that further disruptions in the class were minimized, grading was not negatively impacted, threats to the safety of the students were investigated fully, and students could successfully complete the class. The class met on Tuesday and Thursday nights and continued through the remainder of the semester without any further disruptions. It should be noted that no students dropped the class from November 15 to the end of the semester.

Part I – Findings

- Mr. Derengowski posted information identifying the two Muslim students by first name and last name without their consent on his web site in violation of FJ (LOCAL), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

In his resignation to the College, which was sent to all of the students in his class except the two Muslim students and posted on his web site, he stated that, "To Student A and Student B, your actions betray your true characters. Not only did you act shamefully, despicably, and carelessly, you provided the perfect illustration of what happens to those who really and truly follow Islamic principles. Lying, cheating, and stealing all for the sake of Allah. Surely you must be proud. My heart breaks for you." (Exhibit 8)

In Exhibit 8, Mr. Derengowski devotes several paragraphs, within his Website, in his resignation to the two Muslim students and addresses them in a disrespectful, discriminatory, and undignified manner and calls them derogatory names.

- Although Mr. Derengowski alleges that he resigned under duress, there is no evidence to support his allegation. Mr. Derengowski has publicly stated and has confirmed on his web page that he resigned because he was asked to remain neutral in his teachings of Great Religions of the World. His decision to resign was totally his own. The College administration was left with no other alternative than to take prompt, immediate action in assigning another instructor to teach the Philosophy 1304 class vacated by Mr. Derengowski, in order to ensure the students enrolled in the class could continue to the full and satisfactory completion of the class.
- An email and letter was sent, via US Postal Service, to the 38 students who had enrolled in Mr. Derengowski's fall 2011 Philosophy 1304 class (28 active students and 10 who had dropped the class prior to the November 8 incident). They were asked if they felt threatened at any time during Mr. Derengowski's class, and, if so, to explain, including specific actions and/or comments which caused them to feel threatened; and did they feel discriminated against based on their religion, and, if so, to explain including specific actions and/or comments which caused them to feel discriminated against. Lastly, they were asked to make any other comments or statements they wanted to make.
- Ten of the 38 students responded. Although the students' responses generally reflect no feeling of discrimination based on religion, there are statements indicating certain biases on the part of Mr. Derengowski demonstrated by requiring students to read his personal web site describing Islam as a cult. Generally, the students' responses do not

confirm a feeling of discrimination during Mr. Derengowski's class, although it was stated he made it clear that he came from a Christian worldview. Some of the student responses state that Mr. Derengowski taught his class based on the TCC-approved syllabus and that the history, philosophy and beliefs of each faith were presented with discussion of the pros and cons of each. Other responses state there were occasions when Mr. Derengowski voiced his opinion about what was right and what was wrong about certain faiths based on his personal beliefs. One of the students who dropped out of the class prior to November 15 stated that Mr. Derengowski had presented overly biased views and had expressed overt criticism in his class about certain religions. (Exhibit 9)

- Based on the information reviewed, the evidence suggest that Mr. Derengowski created a hostile learning environment for the two Muslim students in violation of FDE (LOCAL and LEGAL) policies.
- Based on the information review, the evidence suggest that Mr. Derengowski violated TCC Policy, DH (LOCAL), in his conduct during class and actions toward the two Muslim students which in part states:

In order to express the affirmation of the College District's professional responsibilities more adequately, the employees of the College District, with the full support of the Board, do adopt and hold ourselves and each other subject to the following *Code of Professional Ethics*:

Place the educational welfare and success of College District students as the College District's highest priority. Strive to help each student realize his or her full potential as a scholar and as a human being.

Treat all persons with respect, dignity, and justice, not discriminating against anyone on an arbitrary basis such as race, creed, sex, age, religion, or disability.

Refrain from any conduct deemed to be sexual harassment, racial harassment, or any other form of illegal harassment. Report immediately any violation through the chain of supervision.

Encourage and defend the unfettered pursuit of truth. Support the free exchange of ideas and observe the highest standards of academic honesty, integrity, scholarship, and tolerance of other viewpoints.

Recognize the necessity of many roles in the educational enterprise and work in such a manner as to enhance teamwork and collegiality among students, faculty, administrators, and support staff.

Recognize and preserve the confidential nature of professional relationships, neither disclosing nor encouraging the disclosure of information or rumor that might damage, embarrass, or violate the privacy of any person unless required by law. This is not to indicate that persons

of good judgment should not apprise College District officials of legal or ethical violations of College District policy.

Part II of the Inquiry

Shortly after Mr. Derengowski's resignation, three students, Student C, Student D, and Student D filed complaints with Southeast Campus administrators.

Allegations by Student #1

Summary of Complaint: Student C states the following in her complaint, "The Humanities Administration has Failed the students of TCC Phil 1304-41244 by failing to act responsibly on the behalf of all students involved Student B was allow to threaten Professor Derengowski in front of the class, with NO action taken. My documentation is attached, as I've tried to meet w/administration."

Outcome Requested: "According to the Student handbook, Student B should absolutely be subject to disciplinary actions. Prof D should be reinstated." (Exhibit 10)

Allegations by Student #2

Summary of Complaint: Student D states the following in her complaint, "My complaint why the rest of the class were treated poorly and unjustly by TCC administration I felt discriminated. My rights as a student of TCC were violated."

Outcome Requested: "Hope that my classmates and I will get a fair treatment and respect as TCC student the way Student A and Student B were treated. And Prof. D's right as a teacher were violated, because he was insulted by Student B. I think he should be reprimanded and open an investigation on this one." (Exhibit 11)

Allegations by Student #3

Summary of Complaint: Student E states, "The Student Handbook has policies on both students continually disturbing a class and e-mails relating to defamation related to a person. Please see the emails attached to this form. This box isn't big enough for the information."

Outcome Requested: "That TCC will adhere to their policies setforth [sic] in the Student Handbook on the issues I've addressed." (Exhibit 12)

Issues Reviewed:

- Did the Southeast Campus Humanities administrators fail to act responsibly on behalf of the students involved?
- Did the Southeast Campus Administrators violate any TCC policies?

- Did Student B threaten Mr. Derengowski in violation of TCC Student Handbook, VII. Student Discipline Policy? (Exhibit 13)
- Did TCC Administrators fail to take disciplinary action against Student B in accordance with TCC policies?
- Did Student A's email or information that she sent to classmates violate TCC policy on student conduct?
- Did any of the other students suffer from discrimination based on any illegal or prohibited factors including FDE (LOCAL)?

Background: It is alleged that on November 3, 2011, instructor Derengowski began a lecture on Islam and spoke of Mohammad as a murderer and thief and spoke in negative terms about Mohammad and Islam. On November 8, 2011, it is alleged that the instructor continued to lecture on Islam and spoke only negatively about Islam. It is alleged that Student B became upset and began insulting the professor, interrupting him, challenging his credentials and insulting his choice of reference books in front of the class. Late in that same class, Student A and Student B walked out of class two minutes before class was dismissed because they were upset by the instructor's negative portrayal of their religion. It is alleged that the instructor held a mock trial on October 13 as one of the class assignments, choosing the Ft. Hood, Texas, case where Nidal Malik Hasan, a Muslim, had gone on a shooting spree. The instructor is alleged to have chosen two male Muslim students to role-play the legal case, having named Student B as the defender and the class as the jury concerning the shooting spree. The other male Muslim student dropped the class prior to the mock trials. Student A reported to academic administrators that she felt as if she had been violated and discriminated against, "with the way Mr. Derengowski is teaching this World of Religions course."

On November 15, 2011, Professor Derengowski was asked to attend a meeting with Academic Administrators where he was informed of the complaints filed with the Dean by Student A and Student B. Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Barbara Coan, Dean Josue Munoz, and Ms. Sharon Wettengel reported that in the November 15 meeting he was asked if he felt he or his students were in danger, since he filed a police report, and he answered, "no."

On November 17, 2011, the students, Student A and Student B, met with the Humanities Dean, Josue Munoz, and Ms. Wettengel individually to express their concerns, with Student B expressing concern over his personal safety based on comments made by the instructor and others in the class regarding Muslims. He is quoted by Dean Munoz as saying, "he now realized that there was a lot of hatred toward him as a Muslim and that he didn't feel safe on campus." Student B explained that around mid-September a class assignment required students to research a religion other than their own. Student B chose Buddhism and asked to meet with the instructor. He alleged the discussion turned instead to God and Christianity, with the instructor quoting the Bible and telling the student (Student B) he was lost if he didn't believe in Christianity. Dean Munoz and Ms. Wettengel reported that at a meeting with Student

B and Student A, they were advised of proper classroom behavior to ensure they were aware of the proper way to handle issues in the classroom.

During the meeting with Dean Munoz and Ms. Wettengel, Student B explained his statement to the class which was in response to one of the students who said, "I am scared" in a sarcastic tone to which Student B responded, "you should be scared..." as being in reference to him (the instructor), saying that the class should be scared of the instructor, Mr. Derengowski. Likewise, Dr. Coan reported that when instructor Derengowski was asked if there was a safety issue for him or the class, he replied that there was not.

The instructor stated in his police report that the student's behavior caused him to question what else the student might do. However, he also concluded that statement by suggesting only that the police investigate/observe. In speaking with the police, Mr. Rusty Fox, Vice President of Student Development at Southeast Campus, confirmed with the police that there was no threat and confirmed that there was no cause for concern of safety for Mr. Derengowski or the students enrolled in the class.

It is important to note that the instructor filed a police report with the Tarrant County College Police Department. In the report there is no statement concerning a specific threat made to him or the class. The instructor does say after learning his lecture had been recorded that, "it was at that moment my concern for the safety of my being crossed my mind." because 1) the student was "willing to break class rules by recording the lecture without permission, and 2) totally disrupt the class in the abrasive manner that he did," he therefore questioned, "what else might he do." He states that "official police investigation/observation is prudent, at least from my point of view, for me and the rest of the students."

No statements or documentation from the police regarding any immediate or specific threat or related history of disruption have been made, either by the instructor or classmates. The evening Mr. Fox, the Vice President of Student Development, was notified of the November 8 incident, he spoke directly to the sergeant on duty, Sergeant Jeffries, who indicated there was no threat. Ms. Sharon Wettengel also informed Mr. Fox that she had also confirmed with police that there was no danger.

In an effort to ensure the safety of the students and others, Mr. Fox asked the Lieutenant of Police and Dr. Coan, the Vice President for Academic Affairs for the Southeast Campus, if any other records or reports existed that indicated disruptions or threats reported by the instructor, other students or anyone involved. No documentation of threats or patterns of disruption were reported.

After reviewing the complaints of the three students, the Office of Human Resources contacted each of them to follow-up on their complaints and take any information from the students.

Part II Findings:

- There was no threat made toward the instructor from

- Student B. Mr. Derengowski stated in the police report that Student B “left me feeling uneasy and in need of speaking with campus police officials.” He concludes the police report by suggesting that, “official police investigation/observation is prudent, at least from my point of view, for me and the rest of the students until this incident passes from Student B’s immediate memory.” Thus, no disciplinary action was taken by TCC administrators against Student B.
- The evidence reveals that the administrators took immediate and appropriate actions and measures to ensure the safety, security and well-being of students, faculty, and staff based on information and facts. They also took appropriate steps to make sure the students did not have any further disruptions to the class. Police were immediately consulted and involved. Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs and Student Development Services took appropriate steps immediately when notified. Department Chair Ms. Wettengel and Mr. Mark Austin met with the class at the next class meeting. The Department Chair heard student concerns and explained plans for the continuation of class. A new instructor was identified immediately and class continued with only one missed class time, November 15, the evening Mr. Derengowski unexpectedly resigned.
- There is no evidence to support students in the class being treated poorly by administration. College policy and procedures were followed. Mr. Munoz and Ms. Wettengel spoke with the two students involved in the matter and stated that it was their assessment that Student B and the fellow student, Student A, were provoked, and that arguing and then leaving abruptly were preferable choices to remaining in the class, given the tone of the classroom environment. Dr. Coan explained that the website the instructor lists as a resource for this class lists Islam as a cult, and the instructor made derogatory and discriminating statements about Islam and Muslims, further indicating that the students’ concern that the presentation in class was offensive to some students was valid. After reviewing and discussing the matter with the two students, the administrators did not recommend disciplinary action at that time but did counsel with the two students as previously stated.
- Ms. Thomas further alleged that Student A defamed Mr. Derengowski. She submitted the statements made by Student A as evidence that she defamed Mr. Derengowski. The College addressed Student A’s conduct under the Student Handbook and does not find evidence to support that she violated any TCC policies when she sent an email to classmates, objected to his presentation, questioned his credentials, and stating that his information was false, in her opinion of his instruction on religion.
- Based on all the information presented and available, the investigation revealed that in the Philosophy 1304 class there was no pattern or history of disruptive behavior by Student B. No pattern or history of disruptive behavior was reported by the instructor, campus administration, or police. Neither has academic administration noted previous disruptive behaviors in the class. Likewise, the police verify that no record of previous incidences have been reported for this class or these students. The day the incident was reported to Mr. Fox, Vice President for Student Development Services office, spoke directly with the sergeant on duty, Sgt. Jeffries and indicated there was no threat.

Likewise, Dr. Barbara Coan, Vice President for Academic Affairs, informed Mr. Fox that the instructor had also confirmed that there was no threat of danger to him or his students.

- Based on the information reported, the two Muslim students who departed Mr. Derengowski's class two minutes early on November 8 were outspoken in class but were reacting to what they considered false, inflammatory, and derogatory statements about the Muslim religion that Mr. Derengowski had made in class. The two students met with Sharon Wettengel, Assistant Professor of Sociology and Social Work Chair (Department Chair), and Dean Munoz to express their concerns, at which time proper classroom behavior was discussed to ensure the students were aware of the proper way to handle issues in the classroom. The semester continued without any further interruptions.

Conclusion: This inquiry reviewed the five student complaints related to a philosophy class, Great Religions of the World, taught by Mr. Paul Derengowski, part-time instructor (adjunct faculty), at the Southeast Campus. It was determined that Mr. Derengowski voluntarily resigned from his teaching responsibilities without duress as he alleged. Part I of this Inquiry reviewed complaints by two Muslim students who reported religious discrimination and harassment by creating a hostile learning environment in violation of TCC policies. The findings are that Mr. Derengowski created a hostile learning environment for the two Muslim students. Part II reviewed three students' complaints against the two Muslim students for disruptive behavior, defaming the instructor, and TCC administrators for failing to act and it was determined that the two students did not violate TCC policies in their conduct. Furthermore, TCC Southeast Campus administrators acted appropriately during the incident.