

May 25, 2018

Via Email

Dr. Stephen Percy

Dean

College of Urban and Public Affairs

Portland State University

Urban Center, 7th Floor

Portland, Oregon 97207

percy@pdx.edu

Dear Dean Percy,

As you requested at our meeting on May 22, 2018, I am writing this letter to set forth my position regarding your directive that I undergo “individual training relating to campus policy on avoiding discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and gender identity.”

I have repeatedly expressed concerns to you and to the university that the investigation conducted by the Office of Global Diversity & Inclusion (GDI) was a misuse of process designed to chill the exercise of my rights to free speech and of academic freedom. Was it appropriate for GDI to investigate allegations such as I “forced students to debate conservative viewpoints”? Is it not wrong when students attempt to silence professors with whom they disagree with the mere allegation of racism? As a leader of the university, you should be deeply troubled by this situation and what it says about the prospects for free thought and expression at an institution purportedly dedicated to the advancement of knowledge.

After an unduly lengthy investigation that deprived me of the benefits of my sabbatical year, GDI concluded that I had not violated the university’s Prohibited Practices Policy, but that I had made one discriminatory comment to a student. This finding is at odds with GDI’s prior conclusion that this comment did not even warrant a formal investigation when GDI first became aware of this exchange nearly two years ago. How is it possible for GDI to conclude that a statement is not discriminatory in 2016 and yet two years later conclude that the same statement is discriminatory?

As a factual matter, I dispute the student’s version of what was said. While the subject of our discussion was whether I—as a white, male faculty member—enjoy “privilege,” I simply disputed my privilege within the academic context by pointing to the high standards that I had been expected to attain during my recent promotion to full professor. I never said anything about the student in question or their gender identity; instead, I articulated my experience based on my own race and gender. GDI’s response is that this was “discriminatory in nature.” It is highly problematic if all members of the university community cannot share their thoughts on this issue based on their lived experiences regardless of their race and/or gender. It is my position that GDI’s finding and the university’s requirement that I undergo individual training based on this exchange is itself discrimination against me on the basis of my race and gender. This is prohibited by the PSU/AAUP Collective Bargaining Agreement. It also violates state and federal law.

You have expressed the belief that this is a “learning moment.” I agree. However, to impose training upon me suggests that I am the party at fault and in need of further education. From my perspective, this situation presents a learning moment for GDI and the student complainants. They should be required to undertake mandatory training on academic freedom and the responsible use and exercise of the university’s administrative complaint mechanisms.

As I expressed at our May 22nd meeting, I consider the directive for me to undergo mandatory training to be a form of unconstitutional and retaliatory punishment. Despite my appeals, the university allowed the GDI process to be abused and transformed into a tool of intimidation. Now, the university goes one step further with this requirement of mandatory training. Since the publication of my article that provoked this process in September 2017, I have been subjected to a hostile work environment which the university has done nothing to address. By imposing this requirement upon me, you will be perpetuating the climate of intimidation, silencing and discrimination that has been directed upon me because of the exercise of my constitutionally-protected rights of speech and expression, and because of my race and gender.

For all of these reasons, I request that you reconsider your directive that I undertake mandatory training.

Sincerely,

Bruce Gilley