

From: Tiffany Sippial tasippial@ua.edu
Subject: Witt Fellows Meeting
Date: October 15, 2024 at 12:18 AM
To: Dana Patton dana.patton@ua.edu

After speaking with Provost Dalton, I heard back from Luoheng, who
Hi, Dana:

Sorry for the late-night response, but Neely and I got into San Francisco late this evening. I heard back from Luoheng, who, after speaking with Provost Dalton, provided some key points that can help us prepare for our upcoming meeting. He already had the course syllabus.

1. **Focus of the Meeting:** We'll touch on:

- Your recollection of course content and classroom dialogue, especially whether there was room for opposing facts or opinions.
- Any additional required readings, particularly if they presented counter-arguments to the main reading list.
- How do you manage discussions and assignments to avoid perceiving that students must assent to particular views?

2. **Counsel Presence:** Dr. Dalton noted that the presence of legal counsel is not necessary nor recommended for this meeting. The meeting's focus should be reinforcing civil discourse and critical thinking in an inclusive classroom environment.

3. **Content of the Complaint:** Luoheng received permission to share the email that the provost received concerning the complaints, which I have included below. Luoheng shared that one point that the provost made that may be raised is that you chose not to include the general syllabus statement regarding divisive topics, which could have helped set expectations. This might be part of the broader discussion on classroom environment and how to navigate challenging discussions.

Lastly, the Provost noted that since the UFE program is voluntary and students apply to participate, it provides an opportunity to engage them in complex discussions. He noted that the goal is to support faculty in exploring topics that challenge students while ensuring responsible engagement.

I am happy to discuss further between meetings and events tomorrow.
Tiffany

Dear Luoheng,
We received the attached complaint regarding a course being offered in Honors College as part of the Witt University Fellows program. Please check in with Dean Sippial and the faculty member per our normal procedures. We can discuss Monday.
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0111

**Subject: [EXTERNAL] divisive concepts embedded in UA
Dr. Robert Witt Fellows Program**

I am following up on our conversation from a week or so ago regarding the disturbing shift of focus of our prestigious Dr Robert Witt University Fellow program. After these testimonies and conversations, I think it is critical that this program is corrected next semester. I believe the Fellow program may be in violation of our divisive concept legislation that went into effect Oct. 1. The problems stem from the teaching approach and materials selection of leader(s) of the fellowship program. This is the most prestigious program at the University and the fact that it was not reviewed and that the leadership of the program does not feel compelled to comply with our legislation is very concerning.

I have had four freshman and one sophomore Fellow contact me to voice their concerns and disappointment with the program. Three freshmen have sent me recorded thoughts and I told them I would share them with university leaders and legislators that could be helpful in correcting the direction of the program. I also guaranteed their voices would remain anonymous. Their goal and mine is to help the program return to its original intent of producing leaders and civic minded individuals that will make an impact in our communities. Also to ensure the program is not in conflict with our divisive concepts legislation effective as of Oct 1. The current program seems to have a focus on systematic racism, supporting anti racism, correcting social injustice and producing engaged global citizens (as opposed to patriotic Americans). The viewpoints in the required reading books are presented as the correct perspective and other opinions are shut down. The students have stated they feel unsafe, and scared to speak in class, unable to express their viewpoints in the classroom or in class assignments. They have stated the leadership of the program has a clear view of the world from a divisive perspective and other opinions are shut out.

I am going to give you a few quotes from the recordings, but please listen to the recording to get a full perspective.

"I was told this was a place where all opinions are respected and all opinions are safe and foster healthv

respectful and open-minded and safe and honest learning, discourse and respectful speech. That has not been the experience so far. "

"The director is a very liberal teacher and everything is presented from a liberal standpoint and must be accepted as fact."

"everything is presented from a liberal standpoint and it must be accepted as fact. We must be outraged by our own prejudices and our own racism."

"told by the director next semester we will have to sit down and discuss why we have experienced white privilege in our own lives."

Regarding four required reading books for first semester all focusing on poverty from the same viewpoint. No diversity of opinion in the books assigned. Two of the 4 books are by the same author.

"books very left leaning.....these books bash landowner, capitalist, promote socialism, redistribution of wealth"

Promises book :

"Young teens have pregnancies in low income areas because of the lack of men because middle class and upper income women steal them before low income women can. "

"These wild claims (in books) must be accepted as fact. no room for other viewpoints or opinion. "

"Must empathize and agree with everything they are reading and learning and no space for discussion without being shut out."

"director looks for specific keywords and answers to get a good grade.".... student does not want to give answers that go against her beliefs.....just to get a good grade.

"You are labeled as racist and bigoted in class..... you are labeled crazy. "

"No room for other viewpoints or opinions which often times feels very stifling"

"program feels anti-American"

.....

"idea is that the American Dream is bad"

"I want to feel confident and safe in the classroom, and I hate to say it but I don't"

First Semester Books required reading:
Evicted by Matthew Desmond, Poverty by America by
Matthew Desmond, Left Behind by Robert Wuthnow, Not
a crime to be Poor by Peter Edelman

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