

Dear Cedarville University Trustees,

My name is Tim Hewitt. I am writing to you as a 1999 Cedarville graduate, a former Cedarville staff member of four years, and the father of two current third generation Cedarville students.

We are a family that is heavily invested in and connected to Cedarville. I've had siblings, nieces and nephews and cousins attend Cedarville. I've had family members employed at Cedarville both as faculty and staff.

I was blessed with an amazing student experience at Cedarville. I met my wife at Cedarville. And, I see how God continues to work through the University to practically prepare students to take the Good News of the Gospel out into a world that is in such desperate need of hope!

But right now, I am writing with an incredibly heavy heart regarding recent events on campus, and more specifically, the current administration's response to these events - primarily their unwillingness to engage in meaningful public dialogue among the parent and student constituencies who are desperately hungry and calling for that dialogue.

I have attempted to dialogue with the current administration regarding my concerns (Dr. Wood & Dr. Supplee), but unfortunately they have refused to engage in meaningful discussion on this matter.

The climate that my kids experience daily on campus feels to be one of silence. This silence seems to be both modeled and enforced by the current administration. There seems to be no place for open conversation and public dialogue. There seems to be no place for public questions.

Just one week after the stabbing incident, Dr. White very publicly shut down any conversation, admonishing students to stop filling gaps with rumors, and just trust that the right people with good intentions are in the right places. (Feb. 13th, 2023 chapel)

This incident shown a spotlight, and raised questions about the broader issue of how the University approaches and handles cases of harassment. These questions were heavy on the hearts of many students, but Dr. White left no space for conversation, he simply implored students to trust in the system, a system of which they cannot discuss.

This was very much my experience as I communicated with Dr. Wood in the weeks after the incident. Throughout our interactions, he stepped behind FERPA and refused to answer my questions. As a former employee of Cedarville, as well as two other Title IV institutions, I understand the statutory requirements of FERPA. Dr. Wood unnecessarily insisted that since our conversation started as the result of the stabbing incident, even my questions about institutional Title IX policies and application of those policies were in that context, so he refused to answer my questions.

His response to my concern was to simply insist that the right people and right processes are in place, the system has worked and continues to work, and I just need to trust the system. I felt that his response to my concern was simply "Move along, there is nothing to see here."

As I told Dr. Wood at the time, I sympathize with the position he is in, but I cannot in good conscience ignore the disparity between what he is telling me and the direct experience of my kids within the Cedarville community.

And then, literally a couple of weeks after he appealed to me to trust in the process and people, my daughter sent me the attached photo of a recent Speak Up campaign sign, posted in a women's bathroom.

The message conveyed in this sign displays an incredible lack of awareness and sensitivity to women who are the victims of sexual assault. The entire purpose of the Speak Up campaign should be to encourage young women to be brave and report instances of harassment or assault to the Title IX office. This message from the Title IX office turns the table on the victim, asking her to consider her own personal responsibility in her assault.

I am grateful, that after I contacted Dr. Wood about this sign, it was removed in less than 48 hours. But the concern that such a message would be created, approved and then posted by the Title IX office in the first place is cause for great concern.

Based upon my own personal story, first hand knowledge of the personal stories of women that I know and love (both inside and outside of the Cedarville community), as well as spending the past 12 years of cross-cultural ministry advocating for exploited and marginalized women and children in India, I am passionate about the Church boldly and publicly standing up for the marginalized.

I feel compelled to press this issue, because I believe that such advocacy brings Glory to God, health to the community and dignity to young women who equally bear His image.

My appeal to the administration to begin a community conversation has not been received.

So, I appeal to you, as Trustees of Cedarville University to use your authority to start a community conversation on this topic.

Current statistics show that by the time a young woman arrives on a college campus, 4 of 10 have experienced sexual assault. Once on campus, college aged young women are twice as likely to experience sexual harassment and/or assault. And, over the course of their lives, 6 of 10 women will experience sexual harassment and/or assault.

Though we wish it were not the case, Cedarville and the greater Christian community are not immune to this.

This pattern of silence around this difficult issue at Cedarville cannot continue. It is neither healthy nor loving.

Cedarville is equipping the next generation of Church leaders, and for sake of the future health of the Church, the CU administration must be committed to engaging openly, honestly and transparently on difficult topics such as this. It needs to be modeled by CU leadership!

It has been very difficult watching the tumult within the SBC over the past few years, which was only exacerbated and amplified by the Executive Committee's consistent refusal to respond to their constituents in a public and transparent way. The fallout from that has been catastrophic.

The administration's approach in responding to these matters is alarmingly reminiscent of this. I'm not making accusations that there are specific events that are being covered up, but the administration's refusal to even engage in a public conversation is what is so alarming. I am very concerned that a similar reckoning is at hand for Cedarville.

I have no doubt that a public conversation on this issue is coming to the Cedarville community. The question is when, under what circumstances and in what forum; whether the conversation is initiated openly and transparently by the current administration, or whether it is thrust upon the administration from the outside.

So, because I love Cedarville and because I am committed to the mission of Cedarville University, and truly desire its eternal impact to continue into the decades ahead, I appeal to you as a Trustee to do the following:

1. Please consider moving the Title IX office out from under the division of student life. It feels as though there is pressure to combine discipleship and Title IX functions. There is certainly a place in the realm of discipleship to challenge young men and women to consider proper boundaries in their relationships, yet when advocating for the victim of assault or harassment, messages are easily mixed, and the victims are easily discouraged from seeking help. The Title IX Office needs autonomy and freedom to function outside of the influence of other offices and other campus initiatives.
2. Please consider an immediate review and update to the student handbook. My daughter has been told directly by two female faculty, that the concerns of serial harassers not being removed from the campus community is not so much an issue with the Title IX policy but rather a deficiency of the handbook to provide sufficient grounds for punitive action against such people.

3. Initiate an open and transparent community discussion, allowing the administration to have a more realistic barometer of the perception that the student body has on how these matters are handled.

At the end of the day, I do feel that so much of the disconnect is in regard to student and parent perceptions of how the system operates. Without an open and public conversation of how the system operates, perceptions and misunderstanding will only be perpetuated.

4. Please impress upon Dr. White and his administration the necessity, value & importance of engaging in transparent conversations. Refusal to engage in discussion in an autocratic manner only fosters misunderstanding, resentment and the lost opportunity to model Servant Leadership to the Cedarville community.

It would be my honor to be able to discuss any of these things with you individually, or as a group. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Prayerfully & respectfully submitted,

Tim Hewitt
Cedarville Class of 99'

Attached you will find the photo of the Speak Up campaign poster that was posted on/ around April 2nd.