

JAN. 27, 2023 MEETING

SPEAKERS: JEWERL MAXWELL (TAYLOR PROVOST), JULIE MOORE

Transcript provided by Julie Moore

MAXWELL: Thank you all for getting together. I did want to talk prior to the semester beginning. And so, I know we met last spring, and let you know we're still continuing to evaluate where different positions are on campus and uh what should we be thinking about in terms of moving forward. We're about five or six weeks before...agreements are coming out, and we're not going to issue a contract this year, or renew this year. Um. And..

JULIE: For me, you're saying?

M: That's correct. Yes. Um, we are telling you this sooner rather than later just so it gives you a little bit more time than being blindsided when the agreements come out.

J: Well, I'm blindsided today. I don't understand.

M: Um, I mean I can get to that. The [unclear] President Lindsey has approved that there would be six weeks of both compensation and benefits past July 31st, so, um, if you were to get another academic job this would allow for the benefits to continue

J: I can't get another academic job, Jewerl, I'm gonna be 58 in April. Nobody wants to hire me at this age. And I have a daughter to support. I just—I don't understand. I went through a review recently. The need is great. We're short professors in our department.

M: We need...so...the reason behind it is we do need to better support the department, and there has continued to be the concern, especially from the students, of, um, that the content in the course isn't often times relevant to the what the course is supposed to be. Um, this predates me. So there were meetings with Tom Jones where he suggested some additional materials that could make the course a more balanced course—

J: And I, I actually changed the course, per Tom's suggestions and had long talks with Aaron about that, as well. And Carie. So that change has actually happened in the fall.

M: I, I think that there still is the concerns that are continuing to occur. Um. There were students this fall that were still asking after two weeks of class, is this a class on composition or is this a class on the sociology of race? And this office hears it. Greg Dyson's office hears it. Um...

J: So you're saying, without looking at my course and my LMS [Learning Management System, Achieve] and all the instruction I give on grammar, writing style, concision of writing, argumentative and persuasive writing, rhetoric, rhetorical situations and context that—

M: I'm not saying none of the course is relevant, but I think that there are continuing to be, um, the content that becomes the focus and the concern that, um, any sort of objection with the material is not perceived as being positive or that you have to agree with a particular perspective continues to be the concern.

J: But I, but that's just completely untrue. And I've asked students for feedback, I've, the department gave me feedback. Tom did not put that in his letter. In fact, I met with Aaron about that, and Aaron said, 'Tom was just making suggestions.' And the suggestion was just, hey, change the way you start the course so you can, um, earn students' trust and they'll understand, and the first couple weeks of the semester, we just talk about the English language, then we talked, they wrote, you know, a literacy narrative so they could write their own stories about their own experiences. Had some of the best papers I've ever seen. Um, second paper they watched documentary films. I had Kathy Bruner [film professor at Taylor] come in, she talked about how she made her documentary film. I showed that in class. Um, students had a lot of choices as to what documentary films to watch and write about after that and then the research paper, it was wide open, they could choose whatever topic they want. And I've had students who earn A's on thesis statements I disagree with. I've had students who earn A's on thesis statements I agree with. I've had students who fail papers because they plagiarize or do a really poor job, and yet I'm very sympathetic to their viewpoints. Um, so, I feel like, this, this should have come up in my review when Tom and Nancy and Aaron were a part of it, and Aaron told me quite the opposite, that that things were good, and that in fact, the last thing Aaron told me was because we've now covered this, uh, in your review and we're all satisfied, and Tom's satisfied, and Tom's letter is very positive, that, this will never come up again. So I'm in shock to sit here and hear this. I've been teaching on the college level for 30 years, and I've never had this accusation leveled against me. Students do have complete freedom, far more freedom than I have. And um, so yeah, I'm, I'm completely stunned. I'm shocked. Um, and, I don't know what else to say, other than I have the letters from my review, and nothing like this was mentioned, and I've gotten, you know, a lot of good feedback from a lot of students, and I work with Greg. Greg's never mentioned any concerns to me. I've known Greg for 20 years. So, I don't understand what's going on. I'm really, really confused. I'm still a registered Republican, Jewerl.

M: I'm not judging where your political stances are. I'm saying that there, I mean it was as recent as this fall, it was fall semester that, at least this office has continued to get questions, and that's where, [9:00] I think you mentioned at the very beginning that the department has greater needs, and I want to work with the department to find the support that they need, and it becomes more challenging if we, um, continue to have students who will either avoid a course or drop the course because of the course content that is not really relevant to the objectives of the class itself.

J: But, but again, well, one, if you were getting complaints, why didn't you come to me? Because, I, this is my sixth year here, I've never had a provost, not Jeff Mosier, not Mike Hammond, and now not you, come to me and say, "Hey, we're getting these complaints. Let me see what you do in class." I laid bare my entire portfolio to the English department. They saw all my assignments. They saw all my, in fact, I overdid my portfolio, I put so many assignments and PowerPoint presentations. My LMS is there. I just finished setting it up for spring semester. Um, it is completely based on *A Writer's Reference* by Nancy Sommers, who's a leading composition and rhetoric scholar. I mean, at any time, someone could have said, "Hey, Julie, change the theme of your class." We, we, we recognize the different composition classes. I mean the scholarship is very very clear that, um, in composition and rhetoric, composition classes can be thematically organized, um. And so that's the direction I've gone in. But, like, last, the review a year or so ago would have been the perfect place for the Provost or the Dean or the department to say, "Okay, Julie, we understand what you're doing, um, but we're gonna suggest you change the theme because of these problems." But no one said that, and and that didn't come out of the review. In fact, quite the opposite came out of the review, as Tom praised me for doing the work that I was doing. So, again, I'm very confused, I know that I'm not on tenure track, so I have no rights here, and I understand that. But I just have to say how terribly disappointed I am to hear that a decision like this has been made despite the stellar review I had. Um. Students complain and have complained my entire career because I I'm a hard grader, and I assign a lot of work. That was the case at Cedarville, too. But even Cedarville praised me for this exact same class that I teach that Greg's daughter Miranda had, who earned an A in it, uh, 'cause she was a good student. Um, so this has really, um, again, shocked me, um, I think that you're losing someone who has contributed a lot to Taylor, and I just went through the Vision Day, you know, um, I don't know what to do. I don't, you have left me and my daughter in a really bad, um, position. I don't, I don't know, there's noth—I'm gonna go work at Walmart I guess. Um, I think this is an unjust decision. I think this is a decision that has not included any communication with me about what I have been doing. It goes against the decision my colleagues made, my Dean made, and my Provost made when I was reviewed. So...um...God knows I've worked really hard for the Writing Center. So. The fact that this is the first I've heard from any authority figure at Taylor that the administration thinks that the theme I have in Comp. is inappropriate and that this is not only the first time I've heard it but also the day I'm told I'm being fired because of that is just inexcusable. And it's unjust. You have given me no chance to improve. I can drop the theme tomorrow. I can do what Dan does. I'd love to teach it as a Creative Writing class. I'll immediately [unclear at 13:50]. But I don't, I don't know that that would satisfy you.

M: I mean, I, I would have to say that that's, I think a little bit inaccurate. Because I saw the specific sources that Tom had suggested should be part of the class. And, so this is not the first time that the administration has brought this up.

J: Aaron told me those were just suggestions from Tom and that I did not have to follow them, so my chair tells me that...why, I mean, I'm assigning George Orwell this

semester, um, On Why I Write, um, I, I'm, I, I just don't understand, the readings are only about the English language, and it's about how we learn the English language. I, I, again, I'm struggling to understand this decision at all, I just, I don't understand what's going on.

M: I, I think that there are course evaluations that would say something a little bit different. I think there's been consistently [unclear, 15:14] course evaluations—

J: And we addressed that in my review. But, um, again, no one said in my review last year, “oh, because these are weaker than others, we wanna, and and because there's all these complaints about theme, we want you to change.” Nobody told me that. And if I had known that Tom's suggestion to add a reading or two from uh a D.C. think group that is on the religious right, that that was not a suggestion but actually a command, I would have added it.

M: But, did you do anything to change—

J: I changed everything.

M: —per Tom's suggestions?

J: Yeah! I changed everything about the first five weeks of my class, and Barb Bird funded my research on those changes the last two summers through the BCTLE [Bedi Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence]. She gave me a mini grant. And I researched, uh, linguistics. And I researched, uh, discussion of the English language in the scholarship. I read a ton of scholarship, she knows this, she has the records on it. And the whole first five weeks of the class were different in the fall. They weren't anything that I had assigned before. And they were far more grammar-focused, far more writing style-focused, far more MLA format-focused, um, and gave students far more freedom, and the whole first essay changed so they could write their own stories about how they learned to read or write. It's a literacy narrative. It's a standard assignment in the field of Composition and Rhetoric. So I had a student write about his problems with stuttering. I had a student write about, um, her desire to teach her two little siblings how to swim, um, and the communication that had to go on there between them. Um, I had a student write about her experiences with theater as she was growing up [17:30] and how she fell in love with theatre and plays and Shakespeare, and she ended up being in the play in the fall. And etc. So the whole first five weeks of the class are radically different. I changed it all. I changed all of it! All the discussions are different, all the group work is different, all the classroom instruction is different, I made it far more about what the class is, per those suggestions, what Tom said. And again, Barb funded it through the BCTLE. So I actually got money from Taylor to do that. And I made those changes. And then, they still wrote a film review because a film review is

another standard essay in Comp. And then they wrote, um, their research paper, which can be on any topic they choose. Either about the world or the United States, so students may choose Israel and Palestine, they may choose women in India, I mean, they've chosen all kinds of topics. The very kinds of topics that we want students to know about because we want to send students on the mission field, we want students to be in the [upper echelon?]. So yeah, everything changed. And I, you know, as a professional, I just would have appreciated you giving me a call in the fall and saying, "Hey, I've got some students in the office complaining. I need to talk to you about this." Because this just feels like you've gunnysacked complaints and now you're coming at me to just say, "Sorry, you're almost 58. I don't care. You're just gone." Despite all the work I've done, the stellar review I've had, the contributions I've made, and the students I work with. I'm in the middle of building a mentoring program for the Writing Center. I have three of my colleagues on board to have writing mentors in their Comp. classes in the spring. If I'm not gonna be here in the fall, there's no use in doing it. Like, everything I'm doing to develop the Writing Center for the past five years is just gone. So I just, Jewel, I, I'm really confused. I don't understand where this is coming from. And, um, I don't, these, these things, the way you're saying them, did not come up in the review. And again, I met with Aaron, and Aaron will attest to this. And I told him, I said, "So, help me process Tom's letter, and we'll go from there," and all and Aaron said, "It's incredibly positive, he loves what you're doing, we love what you're doing, I love what you're doing." And, um, Aaron, he told me, he's like, "I don't agree with the sources he suggested because we know that, you know, the right wing think tank in D.C. is so, you know, biased." But he's like, "But they're just suggestions." So he's like, "You can take them or leave them. You don't have to do this." [20:31] And again, if my chair had told me I do "You do have to do this. He wants you to add these." Or if Tom had said, "You must add them," I would have added them! Or I would have just changed the theme. Because I'd been thinking about doing what Dan and Aaron do anyway and just teaching it more as a creative writing class. God knows it would be easier on me. And it'd be more fun. So, I just don't understand why I wasn't given a chance in the fall, why you didn't call me. Because you know me. We've known each other a long time. And I would think that I would deserve that professional call. Um...I mean this is devastating to me. [long pause]

I don't know what else to say, I'm fighting for my job. I don't...I don't understand. Especially since Comp. is only 3/8ths of my load anyway. The vast majority of my load is the Writing Center. And I can change what I teach in class. Nothing I have ever taught in class has ever gone against academic freedom or the foundational documents, ever. [22:00] I agree with [Taylor's] foundational documents straight up and down. [pause] I don't know what else to say. If the student evaluations were a problem, that should have been addressed in the review letter, but my chair did not put that in the review letter, Tom did not put that in the review letter, and it was not a topic of conversation in either my [interview? 22:23ish] private meeting with Aaron or my interview with Tom and Nancy, which Scott unfortunately was not invited to attend.

M: Well I am sorry. So, I mean the...our desire is to help in any way we can and there would be, as I said, um, salary and benefits for the six weeks after July 31.

J: And of course I appreciate that, but it's not gonna help me next year when I have no money. I have nowhere to go. And I have a daughter who's dependent on me. Six weeks is...I don't understand why. I don't understand. I mean, are there any more specifics you can give me? Because again, I'm...I don't understand. This is devastating. It's embarrassing. It's a horrible end to a thirty plus year career on the college level. I never saw this coming because my review was good last year.

M: And that's why I was [unclear, 24:11ish] I think that there's um as I mentioned the needs of the department and there most likely there will be more of the adjustment in terms of the load where it quite frankly could be 50-50 load and also thinking through future possibilities in terms of leadership that can help within the department as well.

J: So you don't want Carie [the present chair] to remain chair?

M: No, I didn't say that. But I think that it's good for there to be, um, additional possibilities and and often times someone who would, um, serve in a director capacity elsewhere not specifically where it's English and Writing Center, but um, in other departments across universities that can allow for someone that the chair can lean on a bit. And so that's what we are at least considering.

**J: So, I'm, I'm being fired because you want to hire different people, and you don't want anyone talking about race in a Comp. class.**

**M: No, that's not accurate. So, one, if you were being fired, then we could say that the contract is ending now, um. We're saying that you would serve out the current agreement. We're saying that we would extend the salary and benefits beyond the end of the agreement. I'm saying that I would provide you with a positive reference. Um. I'm saying that last year I brought up that we could do some structural changes, and this was one that was on the table, but last year we did not go in that direction.**

**J: But last year you never said anything about not giving me another contract. You talked about taking the Writing Center title off my contract, but keeping me on as an Associate Professor of English. You never said anything about me losing my job.** I mean, Jewel, I can't find a job this quickly 'cause most jobs were posted in the fall, and I'm convinced I can't find a job at all because of my age and [26:53 unclear]. I don't understand why I can't at least be given another year so I can find a job so I can support myself and my daughter. I mean, if you want me to change my Comp. class, I'll change it, I'll teach it however you want me to teach it. I thought I had the Academic Freedom to do a thematic Comp. class. That's what I

was told every year I was here. That's what was reinforced when I went through the review. Now I find out differently, um, so okay. I won't do a thematic Comp. class, I will just teach a basic Comp. class. And I will teach grammar, and I will teach style, and I really need a year, so that I can figure out what in the world I'm gonna do. I really do, I don't wanna beg, but I'm begging. I don't know what to do. [long pause] I mean Nancy was my chair [28:07]. She never said a word to me that my evaluations were a problem. She never said a word to me that the theme was a problem. Aaron, then, was my chair. Likewise, in fact, Aaron was the opposite. And Carie has been the opposite. Praised me for the work. Praised me for the papers and assignments. Praised me for the content, praised me for the grammar, the style, the MLA, the rigor of the class, that they have to write a persuasive argument, have refutations, do due diligence, be ethical, um. I don't know, Scott's also been very supportive. More, more in the Writing Center because he's not...I mean, can I have a year to find another job?

M: I'm not gonna make a decision in this moment, but I will certainly continue praying on it, and I mean I, um, this was the desire so this wasn't coming up [unclear 29:18] when agreements are coming out, so...

**J: But it sounds like you knew this last year. So why not tell me last year, "Julie, alright I am gonna give you a contract now. But here's what we're thinking. We, we're going to actually give you one more contract for one more year, but that's it." Because then I would have had a whole year, Jewerl.**

**M: There wasn't a decision last spring.**

**J: But you were thinking it because you keep alluding to that, right?**

**M: Well, I think, you specifically asked me last spring are you getting an agreement last year because we had put things on pause, and you did not originally get an agreement, um...**

**J: Right.**

**M: Right, and so I think that last spring it was for other reasons, well it was, again, partially related to what we're talking about now in terms of structure, in terms of what's the different loads of different directors, um, whether it be the Writing Center, whether it be the Spencer Center, uh, whether it be the BCTLE, I mean these are all, um, these have all been areas that have been on the table. And so even as Charlie Brainer has retired, or he's in the process of retirement, his position's going from, uh, he doesn't have any requirements to teach, but the replacement will be 50% teaching load. Um, so that was the focus of the conversation last year, and I would say that that still is at least somewhat related to this in terms of, I do think it's very likely that the Writing Center**

director in the future will be at 50% teaching and 50%, uh, Writing Center, uh, so that's one element of it.

**J:** But you can change that while I'm here. So you're saying you really do wanna get rid of me because I used a theme of race in Comp. class?

**M:** Umm, no, I'm not saying that people cannot use the issue of race. I think that there needs to be a balanced perspective, and I think that that is what we encourage. When I taught courses that, um, included material that I both agreed with and disagreed with, um...

**J:** So what are you basing your assumption on in my class that there isn't a balanced material?

**M:** I think the readings themselves and the continued feedback from students.

**J:** So what readings in particular?

**M:** Jemar Tisby is the main focus, and...

**J:** I don't assign anything by Jemar Tisby.

**M:** It's on your Blackboard course from the fall. [Transcriber's note: He seems to be making this claim based on an older version of the course, which he found on Blackboard. The 2022-2023 course is now on the LMS called Achieve, which he did not look at.]

**J:** I didn't assign any article by Jemar Tisby.

**M:** It's on your Blackboard course from the fall.

**J:** Jewerl, the students don't have any article by Jemar Tisby. You didn't look at my actual course. This is one quotation from Tisby on my syllabus. That's all that's Tisby. So are you saying that Jemar Tisby is not allowed to be taught at Taylor?

**M:** No, I did not say that...

**J:** Okay.

**M:** I just want there to be balance.

**J:** Okay, so who would be the balance of Jemar Tisby, if I were assigning him, which I'm not?



**M: Um, I think that there, look, I'm not gonna get into a debate as to, here are the specific sources that need to be on both sides. I do think that it's accurate to say that Tom suggested that there needed to be balance.**

**J: And I was told, and I talked with my chair about that, and I was told those were suggestions, not requirements. I asked Aaron specifically about that. So how can I be punished when my authority figure told me specifically those were suggestions, not requirements, and you can take them or leave them? How can that cost me my job when my own chair told me that?**

M: I will take that under consideration.

[long pause]

M: You've asked me to reflect more, and I will.

J: Thank you, I appreciate that. And again, I don't, I'm not a proud person, so I am begging for a year, so I can at least figure out what in the world I'm gonna do with my, and how I'm gonna support my daughter. Because if it were just me, I could work at Wal-Mart or something, but it is not just me.

[too soft to hear]

M: I will, I am committed to continuing to pray over that. [34:35]

[long pause]

J: [crying] I'm sorry.

M: You don't need to be sorry.

[long pause]

M: I think you brought items that I need to consider.

J: Okay.

M: So, I will do that.

J: Thank you. [long pause] I don't know...what else to say.

[long pause]

J: [unclear, 36:59] If you want to say something, I don't really have anything...so, I'm on my own.

M: I will, I will take the time, sometime today. I'm looking at you, and I, I'm gonna take the time and um, I owe that to you.

J: Thank you. 37:43