
Today's News

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University Timed Firing of 2 Professors to Avoid Affecting Accreditation, Recording Suggests

By [JOHN GRAVOIS](#)

A conversation between a student and a senior administrator at Cedarville University, which the student secretly recorded, suggests that the university's termination of two tenured professors was timed to avoid marring the Ohio Baptist institution's accreditation process last year.

In the recording, Robert W. Milliman, Cedarville's academic vice president, says that last spring's review by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' Higher Learning Commission was a factor in the university's decision to issue contracts to David Hoffeditz and David Mappes, two tenured professors in the biblical-studies department, for the 2007-8 academic year. The professors were subsequently given notice of termination by the university in early July, after the accreditation was completed.

"We did not want to take these actions before our accreditation," Mr. Milliman says in the recording. "Because we felt ... if everybody's stirred up, there's going to be this problem with accreditation."

The recording, obtained by *The Chronicle* this month, first surfaced on the Internet last August, including links to the audio file on the Facebook social-networking Web site. The file-hosting site that stored the audio file later removed it at the behest of unspecified "authorities."

The dismissals have touched off a period of intense theological debate and faculty turmoil, with several professors describing a climate of fear at the institution in an open letter to Cedarville's trustees, faculty, and administrators. The American Association of University Professors has also begun investigating the termination of one of the professors at the university.

An Administrator Explains

The recording was made near the end of last summer, when a student loyal to Mr. Mappes met with Mr. Milliman, the administrator, to discuss the termination of his former professor. Unbeknownst to Mr. Milliman, the student, a senior named Josh Storts, recorded their nearly two-hour conversation. (Such recordings, when made with the consent of at least one party to the conversation, are legal in Ohio.)

During that discussion, Mr. Milliman told the student that a scheduled visit from accreditors was a factor both in offering the two professors their job contracts and in their termination.

"We were told by certain people that, if you don't issue the contracts before NCA shows up, there could be trouble," Mr. Milliman says on the recording, referring to the accreditor's visit. "They knew that we

weren't going to cause a furor with terminating people right before NCA came."

Mr. Milliman then tells the student that, rather than risk sparking a controversy during accreditation time by firing the professors in the spring or by holding up their contracts, as Mr. Milliman says on the recording he had wished to do the university's lawyers recommended issuing new contracts to the professors and postponing any job actions until later.

"They said, No, you go ahead, issue the contracts, because the termination can take place on any contract," Mr. Milliman says on the recording.

Concerns Over Fairness

Mr. Storts, the student who made the recording, said he did not originally plan on circulating it. "You take a recording in class when you want to hear over what a professor has said," he said in an interview, and suggested that his reasons behind recording the meeting with Mr. Milliman were similar. Thus far, he told *The Chronicle*, he has not been subject to any formal disciplinary action by the university over the taping.

Officials at Cedarville University repeatedly declined telephone requests for comment on the audiotape, its contents, and the turmoil at the school. But Mark S. Miller, Mr. Hoffeditz's lawyer, said the recording brought up a number of concerns, including the confidentiality issues raised by an administrator discussing personnel matters with a student, as well as questions of fairness.

"What a clear example of bad faith," Mr. Miller said. "You offer somebody a contract knowing full well three or four months later you're going to jerk it back and say you're fired?"

Mr. Mappes, after initially filing a grievance with the university, later suspended the complaint, in hopes of reaching an "amicable parting of the ways." Mr. Hoffeditz, however, pursued his grievance. Late last month, in a split decision, a five-member faculty grievance investigation panel found in favor of Mr. Hoffeditz.

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