

October 24, 2003

Dear Chancellor Carnesale,

My name is Tom Wilde and I am a former graduate student of the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Sciences. I am writing to you to bring to your attention the matter of my termination from UCLA, as I believe the facts and circumstances in my dismissal (as documented in my termination file and in my file with the Academic Senate) strongly merit your close consideration.

Several years back now, upon my termination for an insufficient GPA, my advisor, Dr. Nicholas Blurton Jones, and the head of my division, Dr. Val Rust, wrote a letter to the Dean of the Education Department and to the UCLA Ombudsman stating that procedural errors had apparently occurred in the termination process and that grades had apparently not been recorded on my academic record. They requested that I be reinstated and that the termination decision be reviewed. They wrote, in part:

More importantly, neither of us had been asked for any background information on Mr. Wilde's case. Nor apparently was much effort taken to verify the apparent facts of Mr. Wilde's academic record. Incompletes that had been cleared were listed as Fs and no enquiries about their real status or about the student's general progress were made.

Thereafter, when I met with the Education Department Chair (at the time, Dr. Harold Levine) regarding my dismissal, he told me that "there may have been some problems" in the termination process and that the circumstances surrounding the dismissal decision were "murky." My advisor then asked the Graduate Division to review its decision, but the Graduate Division refused to honor his request. At the time of his request, my advisor wrote in an e-mail to me:

I will argue that it [the termination process] indicates that you have been made to pay with your academic career for department error (no copies of probation letters to me), professor and university disorganisation (incompletes not being processed), carelessness by whoever (Harold [Levine, Education Department Chair] claimed it was the Grad Division office?) issues the dismissal notice (for their failure to verify the situation).

And later, when I telephoned the Graduate Division to ask whether it verifies the information on which it bases a termination decision, the then Assistant Dean Kathy Komar told me, "We cannot be expected to do that."

I believe from these statements by my advisor and my department head that in terminating me for an insufficient GPA and then refusing to review my termination in light of faculty suggestions of apparent errors on my academic record, the Graduate Division violated the ethical foundations and the academic principles of UCLA. In fact, two grades for work I had previously submitted had not been recorded on my academic record at the time of my dismissal, thus bringing my GPA below the 3.0 requirement; once these two grades were recorded, after my dismissal, my GPA was brought above the requirement—i.e., had those two grades been timely recorded (or had the Graduate Division either followed protocol by involving my advisor in the termination procedure, or sought to verify the accuracy of my academic record), the stated grounds for my dismissal (an insufficient GPA) would have been non-existent. At the time of my dismissal, the Graduate Division refused to honor my advisor's requests for a review of the dismissal decision by citing a policy stipulating that a request for a review of a termination decision is not permitted when a student is terminated for an insufficient GPA. However, I believe that it is clearly a violation of ethical academic conduct to hold to this policy when, as my advisor and I were pointing out to the Graduate Division, not academic work, but administrative error had caused the insufficient GPA on my academic record.

While I trust that you defer to a competent administrative staff in the Graduate Division on such matters, I believe that we should nevertheless recognize that in the exceedingly large human institution that is UCLA, inadvertent human errors are inevitably going to arise, even within the best of administrative operations. And how these errors are handled bears directly on the academic principles that are the foundation of UCLA. I believe that a close examination of my termination will reveal facts showing that in my case the Graduate Division successfully avoided dealing with and correcting its own errors by rejecting my advisor's requests for a review of its decision and by violating ethical academic conduct in that rejection, and my academic career was what its administrators were willing to sacrifice in order to avoid admission of their errors.

However you decide to approach the facts and circumstances of my dismissal from UCLA (and of course, like the Graduate Division, you may consider my case to have been decided and closed several years ago), I believe the academic principles and scholarly integrity on which the entire university rests still require that my advisor's argument be heard, if not by the Graduate Division, then by the faculty members and students who are, after all, UCLA. And

it seems clear to me that the university itself should demand that this argument be made, by its own professors, who do so simply out of a professional obligation to those same academic principles that they are bound by the university to practice and thereby uphold.

Or, if indeed a faculty member can be willing to argue that his student has been made to pay with his academic career for “department error,” “professor and university disorganisation,” and “carelessness” by whomever issues the dismissal notice “for their failure to verify the situation” and this argument will not be heard in some forum within UCLA, then all UCLA students need to know this very important fact. For when this argument exists, and neither the university nor its professors insist that it be made, we’re no longer dealing with either a university or its professors, at least as they prefer to define themselves. And certainly, UCLA students need to know as a fact (or indeed, as a Graduate Division policy) that when asking the Graduate Division whether it verifies the information on which it bases a student dismissal decision, these students will be told that “We [the Graduate Division] cannot be expected to do that.” (And I would surely guess that all UCLA faculty members would want to know these facts as well.)

It is my sincere hope, Chancellor Carnesale, that you will conduct certain administrators to go back to my termination file and re-examine the facts and circumstances of my dismissal. For I fully trust that were you terminated from your own academic position and one of your colleagues was willing to argue that you had been made to pay with your career for department error, professor and university disorganization, and carelessness by whomever issued your dismissal notice, you too would persist in your efforts to have this argument heard, if for no other reason than out of a professional obligation to the ethical and academic principles on which UCLA is founded.

You can contact me at: [—————REDACTED—————];
or at: [———REDACTED———]. I thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Tom Wilde