

Report on Coaching Sessions with Dr. Walter Block, Fall 2021 May 17, 2021

Meeting Dates: November 12, 2021 and December 9, 2021

I was asked by Michael Capella, Dean of School of business and Sharounda Williams, Legal Counsel, to meet with Dr. Block again to check in after an additional bias incident report was filed based on a student's concern about his lecture on the first day of class in the fall 2021.

We met briefly via Zoom on November 12, 2021 and at that time I asked how things were going....and why did he believe we were meeting again. He indicated that to his knowledge he had only received one complaint the entire semester and since that was from the first day of class he felt that the work we did over the summer had much value in assisting him with the appropriate use of language in his classroom facilitation. He told me how careful and intentional he has been in not using language that could be offensive to students. We also discussed the basis of the complaint and what could be problematic about asking students to help him be responsible for his language choices. When asked why are students consistently reporting him, his assessment of the basis of the complaints came down to these possible points,

- He could be a crappy teacher of the material
- That he is Jewish and it's AntiSemitism
- His is more prolific in his writing so there is more information to target
- Some students don't like him and are taking his class just to complain

I informed him that now that we were discussing the probabilities that we should work to see what is likely happening and see if we could come up with strategies to circumvent or mitigate. Additionally, in the list of possibilities outlined what he has the most control of at this point is "how" he delivers content. So I asked him to speak with his peers in the department who might be teaching the same controversial concepts and discuss how they were delivering material to students to see if they had any helpful strategies since he was the only person in the department who had amassed a series of bias incident reports. I informed him that we would meet again in December to discuss in more detail after his conversation with his peers.

Dr. Block and I met again via zoom on December 9, 2021. When I asked him what happened with his conversation with his peers he indicated that none of them really teach the same controversial subject matter that he does (this was a shift from our earlier conversation in November) and so there was nothing to report in regard to facilitation tips from fellow faculty members. Furthermore, he indicated that he wished that the University would give better support to him and not be so ready to accept students' complaints about his teaching methods. So in this respect Dr. Block seemed not to believe that there needed to be any correction to his teaching style or methods. He told me that the work we did last summer was sufficient and that there wasn't a need for any further intervention. So he indicated he was okay with us meeting on a regular basis to address if this is the choice the University wants to make....I did tell him that is not a suitable solution for anyone involved. If he is unwilling to amend or adopt any new strategies, he should let the University know so that he doesn't continue to waste anyone's time.

I told him that I would be recommending to the University that they hire a facilitation coach to work with him on a more intimate basis to help him with the delivery of content in a more varied and expanded way. He didn't like this suggestion and wanted to continue to work exclusively with me. I advised that I would only reconsider this recommendation if the University with his permission allowed me to view more of his classroom sessions. In particular those that involved him delivering some of the more controversial subject matter so that I could more thoroughly assess his progress. And that once reviewed I would make my final decision about this recommendation.

Ultimately, the University didn't agree to a more thorough analysis of his classroom sessions and so my recommendation about him needing more hands-on coaching stands.....

Dr. Block has made a living and name for himself in his field by provocatively writing and lecturing about labor economics and the like for almost 50 years. So there may be limitations without extensive facilitation coaching to shifting years of an ingrained potentially inflammatory and insensitive teaching style.

His libertarian views may seem extreme to many; in addition his penchant to provoke and incite in dialogue as a means of teaching seems to exacerbate current standards of appropriate classroom engagement. The titles of his books and a survey of his scholarly work attest to this ongoing provocative and inflammatory engagement strategy.

Next Steps

Since we are all aware that Dr. Block employing any new strategies is like exercising a new muscle, it will be imperative that we recognize that he will need some ongoing support to continue to practice the strategies that we have discussed over the last year. I too am pleased that he did not amass a series of complaints as he had in the time before our sessions. However, there still seems to be more work to be done in this area. Consequently, I am recommending that the University engage a coach specifically designed to work with Dr. Block on expanding his classroom facilitation skills. Someone who is able to review taped lectures and give him alternative strategies to engage students without him appearing to be disregarding and indifferent to their learning needs. Since he relies heavily on extremism in language and circumstances to prove his point, a coach could be useful in helping him to use and engage students with other stylistic techniques to expand his teaching arsenal and more readily and fruitfully engage students in the learning process.