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FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SEXUAL EQUITY

Press Release

Letter to David Boren, President of the University of Oklahoma*Posted April 23, 2000*

Dear Sir:

The Foundation for the Advancement of Sexual Equity is deeply concerned that serious inequities have arisen in the case of Professor Deming and those who have accused him of creating a hostile environment. While we have no wish to involve ourselves in the substantive merits of what he wrote, what appears to be a disproportionate attack on his freedom of expression by Dean Snow, in a context where those asserting the charge of sexual harassment seem to be far more in conflict with the mores of higher education, raises grave issues which are of proper concern to all in higher education. When frivolous charges can be used to silence members of a university community and administrators do not condemn such efforts, freedom and equal treatment are brought into question. What is at issue is an expression of opinion in the school newspaper which is constitutionally protected. Such expression can in no reasonable way be called a creator of a hostile environment.

We urge you to seek an equitable solution to this problem by unequivocally asserting the right of faculty to express their views and forcefully calling into question the motives and propriety of making sexual harassment charges in this context. To do otherwise encourages some members of the faculty to believe they are free from criticism or offense and have a right to persecute those whose speech offends them. That path is the way toward academic repression. In addition, charges of this type cheapen the concept of sexual harassment with the likely consequence of rendering serious and reasonable charges suspect. Strong leadership must not follow that path.

We endorse the position taken by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Their role in providing information about such cases is important to all of us with concerns about fairness and freedom.

I hope you will respond to these concerns publicly because these issues are critical to maintaining a setting where the free exchange of thoughts can lead to new insights. Your own strong position on academic freedom can only be enhanced by a serious response to frivolous charges that, left unchallenged, strike at the heart of that freedom.

With best wishes for your university, I am,

Yours truly,

Wm. W. Pendleton

Professor Emeritus, Department of Sociology, Emory University

Executive Director and Chairman of the Board, Foundation for the Advancement of
Sexual Equity
