

College of Sciences

November 14, 2018

**To:** Provost Kimberly Andrews Espy

**From:** Interim Dean Howard Grimes, College of Sciences



**Re:** Inquiry, Academic Management of Classroom for BIO 2053; Fall 2018

**Situation Summary:**

On November 12, 2018, Dr. Moss requested that the campus police escort a student out of her BIO 2053 class. After this occurrence, she cancelled the remainder of the class session.

**Inquiry Charge and Process:**

The Interim Dean of the College of Sciences was charged with performing an academic inquiry into this situation to evaluate the classroom management techniques re: normative expectations and university standards. Thus, I have met with many students in this class including the student escorted out, reviewed many emails sent by other students regarding this incident, the Chair of the Department, Department Office Manager, and the faculty instructor.

**Approximate Timeline and Summary of Events:**

Earlier in the semester, Dr. Moss repeatedly asked many students to a) take their feet off the chairs in front of them, b) put away their cell phones, c) stop talking, and d) be respectful in class. Based on many individual interviews, Dr. Moss seemed to focus on one group of 3-5 students in particular. At the end of October, Dr. Moss requested that these students separate themselves and sit in discrete locations apart from each other. They complied immediately and thereafter voluntarily sat apart from each other.

Throughout the course, Dr. Moss continually reminded many students to take their feet off the chairs in front of them. She felt that the resting of feet on chairs was a form of disrespect and informed the students that these chairs were recently remodeled. By several accounts, Dr. Moss would routinely suspend her lecture, walk to where the student was sitting, and ask the student to remove his/her feet from the chair. Many students, and Dr. Moss, described feet on chairs as a "pet peeve". Many students commented that her resulting suspension of lecture was disruptive to the class and impeded the lecture. They also voiced a consistent concern that individually addressing students in front of the class was embarrassing to the students and also disruptive to the class.

Many students were spoken to by Dr. Moss on several occasions about talking in class and having her/his feet on the chair in front of him/her. Dr. Moss made repeated reminders both from the

lectern and by walking to where individual students were sitting and reprimanding them in front of the class.

Based on my interviews, including what was stated to me by Dr. Moss, this situation escalated incrementally over the course of the semester. On Friday, November 9, Dr. Moss once again left the lectern and walked up to the later-to-be-escorted student (hereafter referred to as “Escorted Student”) and demanded that Escorted Student put her feet on the floor. Escorted Student complied with the request and removed her feet from the back of the seat. Dr. Moss returned to the lectern and finished the lecture. There were no further incidents on this date. During the afternoon, Dr. Moss then engaged in a hallway discussion with a faculty colleague. Dr. Moss shared her frustration with what she believed to be uncivil behavior in this class. The faculty colleague suggested that one option was for Dr. Moss to call the campus police.

On Sunday, November 11, Dr. Moss attempted to send an email to the Escorted Student. In this email, Dr. Moss informed Escorted Student that she was not allowed to attend class until after she met with Dr. Moss individually outside of class to discuss her behavior. Importantly, however, this email was sent mistakenly to another student in the class, and thus Escorted Student never saw Dr. Moss’ email.

On Monday, November 12, Escorted Student showed up to class on time. Dr. Moss went up to her and told her that she had to leave as they had not met individually as per Dr. Moss’ instructions. Escorted Student was confused and indicated as much to Dr. Moss. Dr. Moss handed her a copy of the email and Escorted Student read it. Dr. Moss and Escorted Student then had a discussion with Dr. Moss insisting that Escorted Student leave the classroom and Escorted Student stating that she should not have to as she did not know about this email. Dr. Moss said that if Escorted Student did not leave immediately, she (Dr. Moss) would call the campus police. Escorted Student apparently said that “this class is very important to me and attending this class is part of my grade and I do not want to miss the lecture as we have a test coming on Wednesday”. Dr. Moss responded with a demand for Escorted Student to either leave the class or “I [Dr. Moss] will call the police”. Escorted Student responded with “do what you need to do” and sat down to attend lecture. Dr. Moss went down to the front of the classroom, retrieved her cell phone, left the classroom (this leaving was well after the official start of the class), went into the hallway and called the campus police. Dr. Moss waited for the campus police to arrive. After approximately 10 minutes, three police officers arrived. Dr. Moss spoke with one of them to explain what she wanted done and walked with the police officer to where Escorted Student was seated. The police officer asked Escorted Student to accompany him and the Escorted Student and the three officers left the classroom peacefully. The police officer and the Escorted Student spoke politely in the hallway. Dr. Moss returned to the lectern and attempted to resume class. However, several students had their hands in the air and one of them expressed sentiments that Dr. Moss’ behavior was uncivil to Escorted Student and the classroom. Several other students chimed in. Dr. Moss terminated the lecture and left the classroom.

#### **Pertinent Supplemental Information Reviewed:**

- <http://www.utsa.edu/hop/chapter5/5-9.html> outlines the HOP policy for class attendance and participation.
- UTSA advising maintains the [“ABC’s” of successful classroom](#) management from a student perspective.
- The [UTSA Teaching and Learning Services](#) office has many resources available for effective classroom management. Individual consultation services are available to faculty by

request. Of particular relevance to this inquiry and report are Teaching and Learning resources for a) *Teaching Generation Z*, b) *Inclusive Teaching*, c) *Creating Safe and Healthy Learning Spaces*, d) *Effective Communication Leads to Effective Teaching*, and e) *Creating a Transparent Classroom*.

- Teaching Evaluations for Dr. Moss, Fall of 2015 through Spring 2018.

### Summary:

Dr. Moss failed to manage her classroom effectively in one section of BIO 2053 in Fall 2018. Dr. Moss has an pre-occupation with putting feet on chairs that was identified by all of the students interviewed and was recognized by Dr. Moss. Because of her pre-occupation, Dr. Moss perceives this behavior to be uncivil, while disciplinary colleagues and other faculty would likely disagree. This pre-occupation interfered with her effective academic management of the classroom, and she showed a lapse in judgement in calling in the campus police for putting feet on chairs, which posed no apparent safety risk.

Dr. Moss is considered a high quality instructor. For example, she has a 3.9 rating on *Rate my Professor* and ranges between 4.1 and 4.7 on the UTSA course evaluations<sup>1</sup>. She has taught BIO 2053 for many years without incident. Many students that were interviewed communicated their appreciation as an instructor, and several consider her to be one of the best instructors they had at UTSA. None of the students interviewed for this report, including Escorted Student, felt that Dr. Moss should be terminated from her employment at UTSA.

### Corrective Actions

1. Dr. Moss was relieved of her duties as instructor immediately for the remainder of the Fall 2018 semester.
2. A different instructor has been assigned instructional responsibility for the remainder of this course for Fall '18. An unarmed safety officer will be detailed to the class section for the duration of this semester, and will be introduced to the class by the Dean at the start of class on Friday November 16.
3. As a condition to return to the classroom for the Spring 2019 semester, Dr. Moss will engage with TLS individually to understand her internal and the external factors negatively impacting her capacity to manage the classroom. TLS and the Chair/Dean will monitor her engagement and assess her progress.
4. If Dr. Moss' progress is deemed acceptable by the Dean, Dr. Moss will be allowed to return to the classroom for the Spring 2019 semester. Each semester she teaches for a period of three years, she must engage in a "QCD" (Quick Course Diagnosis) with TLS professionals, and must schedule follow up meetings with TLS to discuss QCD outcomes and implement any resulting improvement plans.
5. Dr. Moss will work with TLS to develop strategies and incentives to minimize cell phone usage in class and on-time arrival in class while discouraging early departure (and work on communication strategies to accommodate individual student exceptions).

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<sup>1</sup> I examined all sections from Spring '18 to Fall '15. Thus, 24 observations were made.