



UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
PLATTEVILLE
OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

To: Vice Chancellor Mittie Nimocks Den Herder
Dean Elizabeth Throop
Faculty of Criminal Justice Department
Director Jeanne Durr, Human Resources

From: Dennis J Shields, Chancellor 

Re: Criminal Justice Department Climate Issues
Date: July 26, 2013

Over the course of the last three years a number of issues surrounding the culture and climate of the Criminal Justice Department have risen to my desk. The purpose of this memo is not to belabor any single incident, nor to assign blame. Rather, it is time for the Department, collectively, to find a way forward that is in keeping with the UW-Platteville institutional mission, our collective commitment to civil discourse, and most importantly our focus on positive student outcomes.

The easiest thing to do would be to blame past departmental leadership for all of the problems encountered in the climate of the Department. This would be wrong, unfortunate, and unfair. Leading a department is a difficult and often thankless task and second-guessing individual decisions after the fact, while easy to do, discounts the many complex issues weighed by any leader in making difficult choices. Further, the responsibility for the civil and orderly operation of any department is a shared responsibility between leadership and the tenured faculty.

VC Den Herder and Dean Throop have recently taken steps to begin to address the challenges faced by the Department. I applaud their decisive step of appointing an interim chair and a commitment to a national search for a longer term appointment of a chair of the department. I also urge them to assist the department by employing outside consultants to work with the entire Criminal Justice Department to build a stronger team, work on communication and conflict resolution skills, and begin to resolve some of the conflict that has built up over time. This consultation shall take place as early in the academic year as possible.

Finally, I want to impress upon the entire Criminal Justice Department that every member of the faculty has an obligation to work collegially and respectfully in the best interest of the workplace, the program, and most importantly the students. I suspect each individual knows the following but I still want to emphasize that:

1. Emailing is problematic especially in handling conflict and dispute. The lack of nonverbal communication and the fact that the recipient is not physically present makes it easy to be misunderstood and/or to be more terse or rude than one would be in face-to-face communication. As you all know, email also presents the danger of escalating a conflict rather

than resolving it as well as offering the temptation to copy or forward to others in order to garner support or threaten.

2. Conflicts, disputes, or simple misunderstandings should first be handled by the parties sitting down face-to-face and attempting resolution. If this doesn't work, one or both parties should seek help from an immediate supervisor, dean, or from Human Resources.
3. Once a decision is made or outcome is achieved, then it behooves parties on all sides to let the issue go and move on with the work of the department. Your work is very important to the university and as always, to our students. You must not let past conflict hinder that endeavor.

This administration is dedicated to helping faculty members and departments create a respectful and productive work environment. In fact, it is the second of four strategic priorities in our university strategic plan. However, achieving such an environment only works if individuals take responsibility, and when senior faculty members step up to provide leadership and role-modeling of teamwork and collegiality. We all play an important role in maintaining a culture of achievement and respect.