

OPINION: GUEST OPINIONS

Wes Morrison: Reckless CU administration leaves philosophy department shell-shocked

By *Wes Morrison*

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Last June, I retired from the University of Colorado philosophy department after 42 years of service. I was a President's Teaching Scholar and was twice named a winner of the Boulder Faculty Assembly Teaching Award. I loved my work and felt privileged to be a member of such a strong and highly-regarded academic department. I am grateful for my many years at CU, and until recently I have had little to complain about.

Right now, though, I am shell-shocked. During the past year, my department has been publicly humiliated by a series of reckless and ill-considered moves by the campus administration, accompanied by highly selective, misleading, and carefully choreographed disclosures to the press. As a result, a fine department's reputation has been irreparably damaged and a very successful graduate program has been trashed.

The administration did not have to do things this way. The overwhelming majority of my colleagues are people of good will who love their work and are justly proud of one another's accomplishments. Even at the worst times, they have shown themselves capable of sitting around a table and having a civil, respectful, and constructive conversation about common problems. They were (and are) appalled by sexual harassment or sexual misconduct of any kind. They were (and are) eager to improve the climate for women, both in the department and in the discipline of philosophy more generally. Had administrators chosen to work with department members in a low-key, considerate, and respectful way — had they been less prone to public posturing, finger-pointing, and patting themselves on the back, things would have gone very differently.

Not long ago a colleague in another department asked me why so many of us had been so quiet about what had been done to us. My answer was that we were intimidated by an explicit threat to dissolve the department by invoking Regent Policy 4H (the policy on program discontinuance). The idea was to fire everyone, and then hire back some of us. Those lucky enough to be rehired would be rostered (for administrative purposes) in other departments. For example, I was told that one of my colleagues might possibly go to geology, that another might be placed in linguistics, and so on.

There was no justification whatever for such a move, and I doubt that even this administration would have attempted to carry out its threat. Even if they had, I do not believe that such a transparent attempt to fire faculty members without cause would have succeeded. Nevertheless, the threat to shut down the department — which came directly from the Dean's office — had its intended effect on many of my colleagues. At the very last department meeting I attended, I mildly suggested that it would be a good confidence-building measure for the Dean to take his threat off the table. You could have heard a pin drop. One colleague actually suggested that the Dean might find my proposal threatening!

On Dec. 2, the Boulder Faculty Assembly was at long last permitted to discuss some of the pertinent issues. It passed a motion that includes this sentence: "The administration has taken precipitous punitive measures against faculty members without due regard for [the] rules." The group had previously deleted the claim that the administration had "created a sense of fear,



insecurity, and distrust among faculty." It is unfortunate that these words were deleted, since they describe exactly what has been done to the philosophy department. Fear, insecurity, and distrust have been the entirely predictable result of administrative posturing and bullying.

The past couple of years have given me a taste of what it must be like to live in a police state. (Think here of malicious gossip taken as gospel, of email surveillance and anonymous reporting, of secret trials and equally secret verdicts.) Faculty members of impeccable character have been afraid to speak out because they fear retaliation against anyone who challenges the narrative being put forward by the administration.

Title IX issues have lately (and quite rightly) received a great deal of attention. But there is another pressing issue on this campus. The community as a whole is endangered when top administrators are permitted to act with reckless disregard for the reputations and careers of both faculty and graduate students.

Wes Morrison is professor emeritus of philosophy at CU.

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Great piece, Professor Morrison. Thank you for speaking up.

The only way that this will be brought to light, and for it to change, is for those who know what is happening, to vigorously protest it. And for others to come to their aid.

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**Wes Morriston:
Reckless CU
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By Wes Morriston

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