

Cedarville's Tenure Tremor

The Baptist university is embroiled in a long-running dispute over the firing of two professors.

Sarah Pulliam | posted 4/03/2008 04:15PM

This story has been updated to reflect the board of trustees' decision Friday.

Cedarville University has become entangled in a dispute over theology and academic freedom after it terminated two tenured professors in July 2007. Cedarville's board of trustees upheld Bible professor David Hoffeditz's termination Friday, despite a report from a faculty grievance panel of five professors that determined that the college had made "administrative missteps" in the termination process. In classrooms, the professors openly challenged other faculty members whom they felt encouraged postmodern or Emergent theology.

"[The board] examined all of the evidence and the testimonies and so on and were convinced without a shadow of a doubt that he had violated his contract. It was not over doctrinal, theological issues at all," President William Brown told *Christianity Today*. Brown declined to discuss the details why Hoffeditz was terminated but said that they have to deal with the university's standards. "[Standards] involved how you treat each other, how you talk about each other, what's acceptable, and what's not. [Those standards] among others were violated."

The vote was unanimous. "Imagine trying to get 30 Baptists to agree on something that is just really phenomenal," Brown said, and laughed. "We couldn't agree on lunch today, actually."

Hoffeditz is a Cedarville alumnus and taught at the university for about seven years. His wife is currently a counselor at the university.

"It's not what we had hoped for, nor do I believe it was the correct decision," said Mark Miller, Hoffeditz's lawyer. "[Litigation] has not been taken off the table. That's not what we're looking for; we're looking for a resolution."

The theological aspects of the dispute center on the degree of certainty Christians can have regarding their beliefs about God and other central doctrinal matters. A Cedarville Q&A [webpage](#) dedicated to the controversy indicates that some among the university community are concerned that the institution may be moving in a "postmodern" or "Emergent" direction.

All faculty are required to sign the "Truth and Certainty" statement, a document created in 2006 that states that objective truth exists, that the Bible is inspired, infallible, and inerrant, and that Christians can be assured of their salvation.

The American Association of University Professors has launched an investigation since the two professors' termination. Cedarville was criticized openly in a January letter written by past and current professors and circulated to the school's professors, administrators, and trustees.

Although the professors are still listed on its website, Cedarville notified tenured Bible professors Hoffeditz and David Mappes in July that their contracts were being terminated. The notification came just four months after the officials had issued them contracts for the 2007–2008 year.

Students have also been caught up in the dispute. Senior Josh Storts secretly taped and distributed a two-hour-long discussion with Robert Milliman, Cedarville's academic vice president. In the recording, the administrator told Storts that the university chose the timing of the professors' termination so it wouldn't interfere with the accreditation process last year.

Another student, Kevin Smith, transferred out of Cedarville because he could not afford the college costs

when his job as a residence-hall assistant was taken away. Smith said the position was revoked because he had sent a letter to the Board of Trustees about the professors' termination and publicly discussed the issue.

The university has also decided not to renew political science professor David Meyer's contract in his sixth year on the tenure track. Meyer was told he was not needed for his extra classes. He supports a position of that the Bible is true and is knowable with certainty. Meyer said many in the college have vocally supported authors like Shane Claiborne, who is often associated with the Emergent church. Cedarville invited Claiborne to speak at an event in February but cancelled it to protect the university's reputation after concerned bloggers criticized the invitation.

In the 90s, female students at Cedarville were required to wear skirts, and students were not allowed to go to the movies.

"That's long time before I got here. Now guys have to wear skirts when they go to the movies so it's a little different," Brown said and laughed.

The General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC) voted in 2006 to end ties to the university because Cedarville had a public relationship with Southern Baptists. "Southern Baptists are inclusivists and permit the presence and ministry of liberals within the convention," the council said.

"We change every year as most schools do," Brown said. "We have the same commitments to truth in doctrinal statement that we've always had."

The two terminated professors, Hoffeditz and Mappes, filed grievances, but only Hoffeditz carried it through with the grievance panel.

"We have suspended our grievance in hope and prayers of an amicable separation," Mappes said, but he declined to talk more about the situation.

Hoffeditz declined to speak to *Christianity Today*, but he said in a public statement in late February, "My seven-month pregnant wife and I have had our lives on hold for over half a year and my reputation has been soiled. I have spent countless hours, several sleepless nights, many tears, and thousands of dollars to clear my name and return to a place I so dearly love."

Hoffeditz later pulled the public statement from the Internet, writing that he has been threatened with legal action. President Brown said it was not by the university:

"He was never ever threatened with litigation," Brown said. "We don't sue other believers."

The grievance panel stated that Cedarville did not issue Hoffeditz written reprimands, warnings, or plans of correction before he was terminated.

According to the Chronicle of Higher Education, the panel wrote that both professor and university were guilty of acting "uncharitably and unprofessionally." It stated that Hoffeditz is just one example of a "unique period of turbulence" at Cedarville, "given root by a Bible department unable to resolve its longstanding interpersonal and philosophical differences ... In this particular case, a Christ-centered community we are not."

A group of 15 current and emeritus faculty members calling themselves the "Coalition of the Concerned" wrote an open letter this January to the faculty, administration, and trustees of Cedarville.

That letter referred to Mappes, Hoffeditz, and three other professors who either resigned or were denied tenure in the 2006–2007 academic year as "theologically conservative" members of the Bible department. The letter states that there is a lack of confidence in the administrative governance, a perception that tenure is meaningless, and a perception that Cedarville is drifting from its theological position and identity.

"There is a general reluctance on the part of faculty to disagree with administrative policies and decisions, for fear of retribution," the letter states.

B. Robert Kreiser, an associate secretary at the AAUP, said that it will investigate whether Cedarville acted outside of its academic freedom limitations. He said that it appears that the college put the burden of proof on Hoffeditz to show that he should not be terminated.

"There's no inherent contradiction between institutions having a religiously affiliation and being respectful of principles of academic freedom and tenure," Kreiser said. "Nonetheless, we believe that to the extent these institutions consider academic community, they're expected to adhere to the principles in the community."

Cedarville is a Baptist university with a student body of about 3,000 students and is located near Dayton, Ohio.

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