

I regret allowing the controversial after class demonstration on February 21st. I regret the effect that this has had on Northwestern University's reputation, and I regret upsetting so many people in this particular manner. I apologize. As I have noted elsewhere, the demonstration was unplanned and occurred because I made a quick decision to allow it. I should not have done so. In the 18 years I have taught the course, nothing like the demonstration at issue has occurred, and I will allow nothing like it to happen again.

To admit that I did not anticipate the degree of reaction my decision provoked does not even begin to convey my surprise. During a time of financial crisis, war, and global warming, this story has been a top news story for more than two days. That this is so reveals a stark difference of opinion between people like me, who see absolutely no moral harm in what happened, and those who believe that it was profoundly wrong.

I have already stated my case as clearly as I could (see: <http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/JMichael-Bailey/articles/Baileystatement.pdf>): The demonstration was relevant to a topic relevant to my course, it occurred after class in a completely voluntary setting with ample information about what would occur. It involved an act that although unusual, had no harmful effect on anyone. Observers were Northwestern students legally capable of voting, enlisting in the military, and consuming pornography, as well as making many other serious decisions that legal adults are allowed to make.

Those who believe that there was, in fact, a serious problem have had considerable opportunity to explain why: in the numerous media stories on the controversy, or in their various correspondences with me. But they have failed to do so. Saying that the demonstration "crossed the line," "went too far," "was inappropriate," or "was troubling" convey disapproval but do not illuminate reasoning. If I were grading the arguments I have seen against what occurred, most would earn an "F." Offense and anger are not arguments. But I remain open to hearing and reading good arguments.

Although as I have noted, I regret allowing the demonstration, as an educator I do not think we should waste the opportunity the controversy has raised. There are real, important issues here, including optimal limits on academic freedom, the effect of sexual attitudes on education, and sexual rights and responsibilities, among others. A great university, such as Northwestern University, should be a place where people are not only free, but encouraged, to debate our most contentious issues. These include, apparently, the issues raised by the February 21st demonstration.

I am working with undergraduate students to arrange an event that includes high-level discussion and debate about the February 21st demonstration and the issues it has raised. I invite President Schapiro to work with us to help ensure that this event is as intellectually valuable as it should be.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation and admiration to the many students, colleagues, and parents who have written me in support. They, also, are part of the Northwestern community, along with some of those whom I have offended.

J. Michael Bailey
Professor
Evanston, IL
3/5/11