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LCSD1 teacher fired for “infraction” much less serious than LCCC’s Darrel Hammon committed on student trip to Costa Rica

First of a three part series

Dr. Darrel Hammon, the ever-traveling president of the local community college, took a free “family vacation” to Costa Rica as part of a LCCC student biology class trip and his actions (or lack thereof) involving a young female student on the trip probably exacerbated her fragile mental health and his orders could have resulted in a prison term in Central America for a trusting and obedient male student.

For his mishandling of so many aspects of that Costa Rica trip, he returned and kept all details about the travel under wraps for as long as he could. Then, when the Cheyenne Herald accessed a copy of the critical Care Team Report, he convinced his weak-kneed board of trustees to authorize an expensive and worthless temporary restraining order against the publication Hammon calls “the advocacy journal.” All the while, Hammon considers himself the “victim” of this misadventure, even to the point of being critical of the girl’s parents for allowing her to make a trip that caused minimal disruption to his “family vacation” junket paid for by students who did pay their own way.

He now portrays himself as “put upon.”

Contrast that with actions taken against a local junior high school substitute teacher.

On her first day at a new school, her class had a minor disturbance, which she controlled at the time and spent the class period trying to conduct her class for the benefit of the most students in attendance. Her position at the beginning of the class was furthest from where the “incident” occurred. She heard a minor commotion and turned and went to the sound. A male student was on the floor - sitting. There was no student over him or on him. He was preparing to regain his footing.

The substitute teacher was told there had been “play fighting” between the sedentary student and another male student.

No one said that the boy on the floor had been knocked there by a blow or push or had been choked. It appeared he had lost his balance and slipped to the floor. No threats were heard. Seeing a slight abrasion near his elbow that was pooling minimal blood, she asked the student if he’d like to go to the nurse’s office. He said “no” and wiped the blood off with the sleeve of the hoodie he was wearing.

This student sat at a round table with a couple other students and class proceeded. The sub saw that the student put his head down on the table and pulled his hood up over his head. She went to him and asked him to remove the hood from over his head because that was against the rules. He didn’t and she did not pursue the matter because he was not being disruptive - he just wasn’t doing his classwork. No one approached him to “bully” him and no one shouted at him from across the classroom.

What transpired later cost the substitute teacher her job and her ability to make a living. That is where this story will go in the next issue. It ain’t pretty.

Developing ... There are several major stories that I am in the middle of and could not complete in time for this issue or just didn’t have space enough to include them in the length and depth they warrant -- including details about the tattoo artist’s permit denial and questionable and objectionable behavior by the mayor and acting police chief pertaining to their actions in the matter. As askance as you may view the piercing videotaping, city officials behavior may disgust you just as much.

There will also be further coverage about the Wyoming Highway Patrol trooper who is now in prison for kidnapping and whether his earlier behavior should have tipped WHP supervisors as to his potential for dangerous conduct that could have led to the death of a Walmart truck driver.

Also, how the personal behavior of the Laramie County Attorney conflicts with decisions he has made toward citing and prosecuting Laramie County residents for violations he himself would, and probably will, eventually be found guilty. And, progress on the Warren National University litigation; allegations that a local businessman who is a multiple felon is involved in an interstate business for which he cannot hold a license; and the Cheyenne Herald’s ongoing investigation into various LCCC matters.

Dr. Cook decision by Paul Hickey is wrong

First of a multi-part series

This wrongful termination appeal hearing turned out to be a basic “throw a bunch against the wall and hope some sticks” effort against former LCCC vice president of student activities, Dr. James Cook. I personally sat through three days of the hearing and LCCC did not make a compelling case for dismissal.

What I heard Darrel Hammon, temporary president of LCCC, say to hearing officer Paul Hickey and the LCCC board of trustees is that he had five allegations against the former vice president and three of them were major and were the ones he hung his hat on so far as having “cause” to terminate Cook’s employment.

Paul Hickey greatly disappointed me. I thought he might be one guy who would be principled enough to make the right decision - who would not need the money LCCC could pay him for repeated appeals of wrongful termination claims by former LCCC employees (at least four more) and would decide on the merits - not future gigs. But, it seems to me, when push came to shove, Paul sifted through a ton of garbage presented by LCCC and relied upon two “accusations” that would not justify even a written reprimand. Of 28.

I don’t know where Hickey got 28 charges. That isn’t what was presented in the public hearing and you wouldn’t think he would consider “memo” accusations that were not publicly presented to the terminated LCCC vice president for rebuttal.

Neither of the “violations” Hickey ruled were serious enough to warrant dismissal amounted to a bucket of warm spit. Cook missing the student disciplinary hearing was a meaningless absence and when Cook e-mailed an employee to apologize to her and a trustee to inform him - after Hammon gave him conflicting directives in a meeting attended by another LCCC employee who testified she did not understand what Cook was told by Hammon - were hardly grounds for termination.

I have reviewed the case file of the student whose disciplinary hearing Jim Cook missed. Dr. Cook called in early that morning and advised his assistant that he was taking a “mental health day” and would not be in to chair the hearing and they discussed who would chair it in Cook’s absence. Cook had that authority (to appoint a “designee”) from LCCC Procedure No. 5751. That was never disputed at his appeal hearing.

LCCC prevailed at that student disciplinary hearing. And they should have. The student was a real danger on campus. He was criminally charged in his home town of Sidney, Nebraska at about the same time and a condition of dismissal (without prejudice) of those charges was that he move to Michigan. He instead returned to LCCC, demanded and won reinstatement (from Cook) by misrepresenting what had happened in Nebraska, then further stalked and harassed a former girlfriend and others. He was then banned from LCCC again and he appealed that discipline to the local District Court. The student dropped his action without resolution by the Court and it is dead. I believe Cook was terminated because of this lawsuit - not the hearing. Hammon and LCCC attorneys misread the risk of this litigation. LCCC prevailed and the student dismissal, the right decision, ended without further incident or cost to LCCC.

What is the Cheyenne Herald? It is a [generally] bi-weekly publication that I hesitate to refer to as a “newspaper” but calling it an “Opinion/Commentary” publication does not adequately describe it either. While much of what appears on these pages is opinion, commentary and/or essay, much of it is breaking news. When I recently disclosed the details of a trip to Costa Rica by a LCCC class in August of 2008 and the subsequent Care Team Report [critical of the LCCC president’s leadership on that trip] that college president Darrel Hammon had kept secret for so long, that was news. That was not commentary. Not opinion. That was fact. Those disclosures earned me a temporary restraining order in violation of all protections of freedom of the press and the Herald’s first amendment rights. On the other side of the coin, when I write that the University of Colorado switching from the Big 12 to the PAC 10 is dumb, that is my opinion. An article written by someone else will have a byline. Mine will almost never have one. The Cheyenne Herald is not a member of the Wyoming Press Association. I pay dues to no one nor any organization for the privilege of disclosing the truth. What is presented here is original. Space is not filled with wire service fodder, comics or crossword puzzles. The Cheyenne Herald is Wyoming’s only investigative publication and I take that distinction very seriously. I do not claim to be “fair and balanced.” I try very hard to be “accurate and honest.” I offer no forum or blog for tormented souls to anonymously rant but e-mail and snail mail addresses and a phone no. is offered on every inside page of the Herald. If you contact me to criticize or complain, you’ll have to identify yourself - unlike the WTE forum - or I’ll ignore your words or voice.

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