

The case of the pornographic professor

By Malcolm A. Kline

While big city mayors have spent a decade cracking down on pornography, at least one college professor in the Midwest uses it as a teaching aid in class.

Although the class created some controversy, few reporters writing about it and hardly any university officials in a hearing on whether the lecturer met the school code bothered to look at what, exactly, the professor teaches. At the University of Kansas at Lawrence, Professor Dennis Dailey's catalogue description only uses one word to characterize the material used by the lecturer in his course on sex education-- "explicit."

Students who took versions of Professor Dennis Dailey's Sex Education course at the University of Kansas report viewing dwarves, the disabled and homosexuals in what might be called compromising situations. "Prior to viewing the slides, I did say that students would see lots of variety, including variations in age, race, anatomical structure, etc.," Professor Dailey wrote in his official defense. "It is in that context that two slides of children's genitals were shown," the professor explained.

The professor's course covers the gamut of sexual activity. One of his students taped a lecture devoted to fetishes and pedophilia. Of the latter, Professor Dailey points out that "The law views this as wrong."

Professor Dailey himself does not rush to judgment on pedophiles save for one aspect of their activity. "The pedophile who blames the kid and says the child was asking for it is wrong," Professor Dailey told his class. The tape of that lecture, which university officials refused to listen to in the presence of the student who had it recorded, features a number of clicks between the quotes but none in the middle of the quoted sentences.

Professor Dailey taught at KU for decades in this manner, winning rave student evaluations and even awards, such as the Del Shankel Teaching Excellence Award from the school's student athletes. Students who took his classes in earlier years, though, do not recall his comments on pedophilia.

Most of his students do rate him highly. One of those who didn't-Jessica Zahn-came forward earlier this year. "Since he offered a mini-version for no credit at a church, I just assumed it was reputable," Jessica said. From the comments on pedophilia to the nature of the films and slides used to the manner in which the subject matter is taught, Professor Dailey, in his formal defense, does not deny any of the allegations that Jessica and others have made about his teaching and his class.

Interestingly, though she came out very publicly with her misgivings about the course, Jessica received an A in it from the professor. "When I would check the grades on his door about 90 percent had an A," Jessica remembers, "which is far from the bell curve, especially since for most of the semester, the lecture hall was less than half full."

Jessica signed up for the class shortly before she began an internship in the state assembly, with a senator who ran for office on a campaign centered around fiscal austerity and family values. State Sen. Susan Wagle looked into the professor's academic record and introduced a resolution to cut funding to the university.

After the Legislature passed the resolution, Governor Kathleen Sebelius vetoed it, citing "academic freedom." At the same time, the university looked into the matter.

In its examination of evidence, KU accepted all the documentation that Professor Dailey had to offer but dismissed the information Jessica provided. Not too surprisingly, the university exonerated Dailey.

Meanwhile, the University fired Jessica's husband, who works as a computer specialist. KU gave "budget cuts" as the reason for Jessica's husband's dismissal. These same cutbacks left other university personnel, such as the sixty-something-year-old Professor Dailey, unmolested.

The atmosphere at KU is so politically correct, say graduates of the school, that the university now views the placement of a Christmas tree in an administration building as potentially offensive. The aura around Jessica, following her appearance on Fox TV's The O'Reilly Factor, became so charged that she ran into taunts from student supporters everywhere she turned. She even found human body waste smeared outside the door of the apartment she and her husband live in.

Although Jessica herself admits that the professor is popular, not one student would go on, or even off, the record supporting him. An offer made to a KU representative one week before Labor Day to talk to every student the school could produce who supports the professor has thus far yielded one coed with a wrong number.

Recently, Kansan.com reported that, "When asked, Dailey's adamant he's still ready for a fight." At the same time, Professor Dailey refused an official request through the university for an interview. Calls to his office and home and an e-mail with questions all went completely unanswered.