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Our University – Academic Integrity

Walter V. Wendler
Southern Illinois University Carbondale, wendler@siu.edu

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Our University – Academic Integrity

Fifth in a series on Integrity

Free inquiry is the basis for university excellence. When a faculty member produces research findings in contrast, at odds, or inconsistent with a position of the university, the board, or a donor, academic integrity must rule. Professor David Gilbert, a faculty member at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, conducted investigations into the Toyota gas pedal malfunctions. Toyota happens to be a donor to SIUC.

Gilbert's research demonstrated possible problems with electronic systems in Toyotas. There are disagreements regarding his work. Questions about the conditions under which the research was carried out suggest the results would never occur in vehicles during normal use.

No problem when academic integrity is present.

I remember when caution about Saccharin surfaced again (concerns about Saccharin existed when first discovered in a research laboratory at Johns Hopkins University in 1878 and have never ceased) in the early 1970's leading to the assertion that Saccharin caused bladder cancer. In order to make the connection between Saccharin and cancer, scientists fed laboratory rats the quantity of Saccharin contained in 24 cases of artificially sweetened soda pop, 576 twelve-ounce cans, in a single dose.

Not normal.

Rats don't like artificially sweetened soda pop, and even if they did, they would not drink 24 cases in a single sitting. There are some things you just can't get a rat to do.

Again, no problem when academic integrity is present.

Researchers define the conditions under which the findings of their investigations occur. It is the job of other scientists to determine whether or not the findings are valid and reliable. Free falling objects descend at rate of 32 feet per second squared - but only at sea level - never in Denver.

The less than convenient, sometimes chaotic, and at times controversial work of substantiating research findings is the work of science, and it represents both the cost and benefit of academic integrity.

The University of Illinois recently did not renew a contract for an adjunct lecturer who was teaching on the Catholic faith. It turns out that professor Kenneth Howell is on the payroll of the St. John's Newman Center, one of hundreds of

Newman Centers world wide intended to support students in their faith. Contemporary universities cannot offer this because of the complexities of modern church and state arguments. Many religious organizations, Christian or otherwise, have similar outposts near universities. And so it has been for a few centuries as discussions of faith have been driven off university campuses, as biased and unscientific.

Professor Howell told the students what Catholic teachings on homosexuality were and this offended people. The Catholic Church takes a biblical position that asserts that it is not God's will for people to engage in homosexuality. Catholic doctrine states that God intends men and women to be bound in marriage, and within that sacramental relationship, sexual activity should occur, and no other.

Whether you share that belief or not it is, in fact, Catholic teaching.

As long as Kenneth Howell has academic integrity there is no problem in his teaching or his relationship with St. John's. It abridges no right. Exposing students to various perspectives is not the same as proselytizing or brainwashing. A university student worth his salt makes his own decisions about such matters.

If not, the university made a mistake in admitting him.

A university should not protect students, the public, corporations, or itself from controversial or diverse points of view that are matters of fact, proven, or under investigation. Academic integrity allows various positions to be taken and defended and even with scrupulous integrity no position on any subject is free of bias.

Integrity allows bias to surface and be examined.

At our university and all others, openness and integrity lead to quality and a "Higher Education". Otherwise no education occurs at all, save possibly a bit of training.