



THE SYSTEM CONNECTION

Greetings:

A letter from longtime SIUC history Professor Jonathan Bean was my inspiration for this edition of the *Connection*. He hopes we will “take a stand now” regarding a free speech **statement** issued earlier this year by the University of Chicago. In his letter, Jon calls it “one important resolution in defense of vigorous debate and conflicting opinions in the search for truth and knowledge.”

It would seem obvious that robust inquiry and freedom of expression are fundamental to who we are in HIED. But this has in fact become an issue at some universities and has even prompted some outside of academia, including President Obama, to weigh in on what's being referred to as the “coddling” of today's college students. A September cover **story** in *The Atlantic*, which explores the topic in extensive detail, has generated a great deal of buzz across the higher education landscape.

At the heart of this issue – and it seems to be generating some passionate debate -- are “trigger warnings”: When students ask faculty to let them know in advance of course materials or discussions that could cause anxiety.

Based on my readings about this – there seems to be a story on the topic virtually on a weekly basis in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or *Inside HigherEd*, and coverage of it has been growing in the mainstream media – trigger warnings originally stemmed from the clinical treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder in soldiers. In recent years, we all have become familiar with the cautions we see and hear online and on TV about a potentially disturbing report or video, particularly when related to domestic violence or sexual assault. On college campuses, students have asked for trigger warnings related to those topics as well as racism, abortion, suicide and other subjects.

For those of us who are faculty, this national conversation may lead to a variety of questions that can impact what we hope to accomplish in the classroom: Is it our responsibility to shield students? Do we have an obligation to protect victims of trauma? Is providing intellectual challenges to our students and preparing them for the realities of life - which, as we all know, can be harsh - an appropriate part of the educational experience?

If I was still in the classroom, I believe that my answer to the first two questions would be “no”; while my answer to the third question, a resounding “yes.”

I should point out that this has not become a campus-wide issue at either SIUE or SIUC at this point. It likely has come up in some classes, and that's where I think the decision should rest – with individual faculty members. I expect that they are sensitive to the needs of our students; at the same time, it is impossible to anticipate how any student might react to a topic an instructor deems appropriate for a lecture or the in-class discussion it might generate. If an individual student approaches a faculty member with specific concerns, I would hope the instructor would refer the student to the appropriate resources on campus.

We want faculty to challenge our students, to help them think more broadly. Obviously, it's not appropriate for any member of the faculty or staff to insult a student's values or faith. There is a line between that kind of behavior – inciting confrontation in the classroom would be counter-productive – and helping students to expand their horizons.

In the end, it is the members of our faculty who are best suited to make these judgments.

Randy Dunn

Faces of SIU



Tawanda Greer-Medley parlayed the doctorate she earned in counseling psychology from SIUC in 2003 into a tenured professorship at the University of South Carolina. Over a 10-year stretch, she taught undergraduate and graduate courses and was a core faculty member in that university's clinical-community psychology program. And this fall, she returned to the counseling psychology program that helped launch her teaching and research career as an associate professor.

Tawanda's research focuses mostly on adverse health consequences of racism and other forms of social inequities for African American populations.

This was an outgrowth of her interest in African American college students' experiences of racism within predominantly white campuses. Through her research, she concluded that negative campus racial climates pose barriers to academic achievement for African American students. She expanded her research to assess the health effects of racism and social inequalities occurring in society at large.

In the classroom, she wants to ensure that students acquire a balance between exposure to material and experiential processes. Tawanda also believes that it is important for doctoral students to become familiar with the factors that influence process and outcomes in clinical interactions.

One of the reasons Tawanda picked SIUC for graduate school was because the counseling psychology program was one of the best in the country. Now, she wants to help the program maintain that reputation.

"I'm an academic product of SIUC, its environment, its faculty and its students," she says. "I am happy to be back to do my part in continuing the Saluki tradition of producing top-notch students who will go on to be leaders in their chosen areas of interests and expertise."

We're glad you're back to share your experiences, talents and dedication with us, Tawanda.