Blasphemy of a Different Kind

Posted: 15 Jun 2011 05:35 AM PDT

Educate Truth shares the following article from Inside Higher Ed as a service to readers. June 15, 2011 By Steve Kolowich Things have gone from bad to weird at La Sierra University. The university, which is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has been dealing in recent months with a...

Click on the title to read more.

Email this  Share on Facebook  6 comments on this item
Blasphemy of a Different Kind

June 15, 2011 6 Comments

Educate Truth shares the following article from Inside Higher Ed as a service to readers.

June 15, 2011
By Steve Kolowich

Things have gone from bad to weird at La Sierra University.

The university, which is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has been dealing in recent months with a controversy over the teaching of evolution that has its Adventist benefactors threatening to withdraw its religious accreditation — and the $4 million per annum that comes with it. Now the university faces a scandal in which a trustee, a vice president, a dean, and an adjunct professor were asked to resign over a recording made, purportedly by accident, of the four men talking informally about the church and university leadership.

The president of La Sierra’s board of trustees on Friday asked for the resignations of Jeff Kaatz, the vice president for university advancement; Jim Beach, the dean of arts and sciences; Lenny Darnell, a trustee; and Gary Bradley, an adjunct professor of biology, according to a campus wide note from the administration.

In recent years, La Sierra has been at the center of an imbroglio over the teaching of human origins that was sparked when a website published e-mails between a biology student and Bradley, the adjunct caught up in the current debacle. (Read more)
News

Blasphemy of a Different Kind
June 15, 2011

Things have gone from bad to weird at La Sierra University.

The university, which is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has been dealing in recent months with a controversy over the teaching of evolution that has its Adventist benefactors threatening to withdraw its religious accreditation — and the $4 million per annum that comes with it. Now the university faces a scandal in which a trustee, a vice president, a dean, and an adjunct professor were asked to resign over a recording made, purportedly by accident, of the four men talking informally about the church and university leadership.

The president of La Sierra’s board of trustees on Friday asked for the resignations of Jeff Kaatz, the vice president for university advancement; Jim Beach, the dean of arts and sciences; Lenny Darnell, a trustee; and Gary Bradley, an adjunct professor of biology, according to a campuswide note from the administration.

In recent years, La Sierra has been at the center of an imbroglio over the teaching of human origins that was sparked when a website published e-mails between a biology student and Bradley, the adjunct caught up in the current debacle.

Bradley had rejected a student paper for failing to demonstrate an adequate understanding of mainstream evolutionary theory before advocating for a creationist alternative. That led to an investigation by the board into the biology curriculum. In April, the Seventh-day Adventist Church North American Division voted to extend La Sierra’s religious accreditation by a single year and advised the university to rededicate itself to Adventist principles. (One of the church’s fundamental beliefs is that God created all human things in six days, as described in the Bible.)

In a note to the campus on Monday, the university’s public relations office said that “these resignations have no connection to the biology controversy.” But according to an account published Tuesday in Spectrum, an Adventist publication, the recording that prompted the resignations was made following a meeting between the Adventist accreditors and the La Sierra faculty.

Darnell, the La Sierra trustee, was present at the meeting and decided to record the proceedings using an application on his smartphone.

According to the Spectrum article, Darnell met up afterward with Beach, Bradley, and Kaatz at a private home, where they watched a National Basketball Association playoff game and discussed the meeting. The recorder kept running, unbeknownst to the four men. It captured “foul language, references to alcohol consumption and unflattering comments being made about board members, administrators, and church leaders,” according to the article. Darnell then sent the recording to a number of key members of the Adventist community, including The Spectrum, reportedly without knowing that it contained more than just the audio of the meeting. Eventually, the recording made its way to Ricardo Graham, chair of the board of trustees.

La Sierra has declined to offer its own version of events. But Larry Becker, a spokesman for the university, confirmed the basic details of this narrative to Inside Higher Ed. He could not confirm the content of the recording, however, because, he said, he has not personally listened to it. Neither Kaatz, nor Beach, nor Darnell, nor Bradley responded to messages from Inside Higher Ed.

In an e-mail to colleagues, Bradley confirmed that he had admitted on the recording that he drank “a small glass of an alcoholic
beverage during this conversation” — a fireable offense for faculty members at La Sierra, which has a strict temperance policy. Bradley also said the recording was made by accident, despite speculation that he was the target of sabotage based on his role in the evolution controversy. “It was more ‘Three Stooges’ than ‘James Bond,’ ” he wrote in an addendum to the e-mail.

In a statement on Tuesday, the university reiterated its stance that the situation has nothing to do with the conflict over the biology curriculum.

“Because La Sierra University has been the center of the biology debate in the Church for several years, it is also easy for people who do not know the facts to jump to the conclusion that these resignations must be related to that issue,” it said. “Some have taken it further, blaming the Church for carrying out a biology-related ‘witch hunt’ by asking these individuals to resign. This is simply not true. The ‘convenient’ explanation is sometimes the wrong one.”

Bradley, the biology adjunct, said in his e-mail that he was devastated by the turn of events that has led to his resignation, though he gave no explicit indication that he plans to fight the termination on legal grounds. “I’m not ready to quit…. I have many important projects underway here now and many other people will be inconvenienced by my sudden departure,” he wrote.

“If you are among those who welcome this transition, I request that you celebrate with dignity,” Bradley added. “If you are among those who find this transition upsetting, I ask that you not turn it into a war.”

*For the latest technology news and opinion from Inside Higher Ed, follow @IHETech on Twitter.*

— Steve Kolowich

© Copyright 2011 Inside Higher Ed