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By David Olson

Two top La Sierra University administrators, a part-time biology professor and a member of the Riverside college’s board of trustees have resigned after a recording of a private conversation among them emerged. The tape included derogatory comments about leaders of the university and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with which La Sierra is affiliated, and references to alcohol consumption, which is grounds for termination for university employees, according to a report this week in Spectrum Magazine, a Roseville, Calif.-based Adventist publication.

Lenny Darnell, the board member who resigned June 10, inadvertently emailed to Spectrum the recording of the private conversation along with his recording of a meeting between La Sierra faculty members and officials with the church’s education division, said Spectrum Editor Bonnie Dwyer.

Darnell had not realized that his cellphone’s recorder was still on when he and the three other men who resigned discussed the April 21 meeting, Dwyer said.

Darnell was unavailable for comment. In addition to Darnell, Jeff Kaatz, La Sierra’s vice president of development, Jim Beach, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Gary Bradley, a professor of biology, resigned. (Read more)
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Darnell was unavailable for comment. In addition to Darnell, Jeff Kaatz, La Sierra's vice president of development, Jim Beach, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Gary Bradley, a professor of biology, resigned.

Board Chairman Ricardo Graham, who requested the men's resignations, was not available for comment. Graham and several other university and church officials heard the recording, said La Sierra spokesman Larry Becker, but it was unclear who disseminated the recording.

Dwyer said she did not share the recording and did not listen to it until after the resignations.

University officials and attorney Richard McCune, representing Kaatz, Beach and Bradley, declined to comment on the resignations until after a closed meeting Sunday of the university's board of trustees.

Kaatz and Beach are tenured faculty members who retain their positions at the university as professors, Becker said. California law prohibits some types of secret recordings, but it is unclear whether that includes recording a meeting at which, according to Becker, 150 people were present, said Peter Scheer, executive director of the California First Amendment Coalition.

The April 21 meeting was to discuss Adventist education officials' concerns with La Sierra, including the church's contention that the university does not do enough to infuse Adventist beliefs on Biblical creationism into biology classes. Bradley was one of the professors at the center of the controversy.

Becker said the resignations were unrelated to the creationism issue.

Shane Hilde, who founded a website in 2009 that has been critical of Bradley and the university administration on creationism, said he was not celebrating.

"Our goal is never to get people fired," he said. "Our goal is to change the way things are taught. This is not a good situation and I really feel for the people who lost their jobs."

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