

Email Regarding Dusty's Writing

Dusty Harrington Case, October 2025

From: Dr. Amanda LeClair
To: Dean Patricia Keller
Subject: Fwd: Review Requested – Article Draft
Date: October 15, 2025
Hi Patricia,

I wanted to forward this along. I'm not sure what to make of it. Dusty reached out asking for my feedback on a draft he's been working on, but the tone feels increasingly troubled. It starts as academic reflection but moves into something harder to follow and more like a manifesto than a paper. You'll see what I mean below.

Best,
Amanda

----- Forwarded Message -----

From: Dr. Dusty Harrington

To: Dr. Amanda LeClair
Subject: Review Requested – Article Draft
Amanda,

You've always struck me as one of the few colleagues who still believes that ideas matter, that we are meant to be something more than bureaucratic caretakers of a decaying system. I've attached the current version of my article, "The Moral Bankruptcy of the Modern University." I would truly value your thoughts. You've written courageously about the ethics of silence, and I think you'll see why I've been losing sleep over this.

I know the tone is intense, but I don't think it's unjustified. Perhaps we could grab coffee or a drink to talk through it sometime soon.

Best,
Dusty

The Moral Bankruptcy of the Modern University

There was a time when the university stood for truth. Now it stands for branding, enrollment metrics, and the quiet management of dissent. The modern university pretends to nurture moral courage while punishing anyone who disrupts its comfort. This contradiction defines the age: we teach ethics while avoiding consequence, we write about justice while depending on inequity for funding.

Every semester, I hear colleagues talk about 'innovation' as if it were salvation. What they mean is efficiency, streamlining the human out of education. Students are treated as data points. Faculty are evaluated not by their ideas but by compliance with administrative metrics. I have

watched committees nod along to language that means nothing, phrases stitched together from the wreckage of once-radical thought. It is a culture of empty assent.

I no longer believe the institution can reform itself. What began as an inquiry into the moral foundations of education has become a confession of complicity. I am not outside the problem. I am embedded in it. Every lecture, every meeting, every grant proposal feels like another act of surrender to a machine that no longer knows what it was built to do.

We used to speak of inquiry as sacred. Now we speak of deliverables. The language of policy has replaced the language of purpose. We teach students to cite properly, to manage deadlines, to behave professionally but not to confront meaning. The university no longer believes in truth, only outcomes. What passes for critical thinking is careful phrasing designed to avoid discomfort. The courageous question has been replaced by the strategic one.

I have seen how fear governs us. Faculty whisper in hallways, terrified of missteps. Administrators perfect the art of polite avoidance. Even our students sense the hollowness. They come searching for meaning and we offer them credentials. They come with fire and we teach them to cool it into something marketable. The quiet tragedy of higher education is that we have trained ourselves to speak in careful tones while the world cries out for honesty.

The machine of niceness hums along. We celebrate initiatives that do nothing, publish statements that mean less. We praise each other for decorum while the core mission rots. The meetings never end. The memos grow longer. And somewhere between the slogans and the surveys, the soul of the university has been papered over. Niceness has replaced integrity. Consensus has replaced conviction.

When I speak to colleagues privately, many confess exhaustion. Not from teaching, but from pretending. We perform engagement. We perform empathy. The deeper truth is that we are paralyzed by institutional anxiety afraid to offend donors, boards, legislators, or one another. The result is moral paralysis disguised as professionalism.

I have begun to wonder if the university deserves to survive in its current form. Its rituals have become parody: ethics workshops without ethical risk, diversity statements without diversity of thought. We stage empathy while avoiding discomfort. It is all too clean, too polite, too afraid. And beneath the civility, a rot of cowardice grows.

I remember when I first started teaching. I believed the classroom could be a sanctuary for truth, a place where young minds could wrestle honestly with power, identity, and meaning.

But even that space has been colonized by the politics of reputation and risk. We tiptoe through conversations as if stepping around landmines. Students watch our eyes, not our words. They can tell when we are performing safety instead of practicing courage.

Perhaps that is the final betrayal. The students still come to us with questions that matter, but we have lost the courage to answer. We tell ourselves we are protecting them from harm, but in truth we are protecting ourselves from controversy, from criticism, from having to take a stand. We are teaching avoidance as virtue.

To teach feels dishonest. To write feels vain. To stay silent feels impossible. I walk the campus at night and it feels like a museum, beautiful, curated, hollow. The lights are still on but no one believes. The collapse has already happened; we are merely maintaining the illusion of structure.

What is left for those of us who still believe in truth, not as a brand but as a duty? The work feels smaller each year, and yet the stakes feel greater. To name what we see is to invite punishment, but to remain silent is to lose what little remains of our integrity. The moral bankruptcy is not coming, it is here. The question is whether anyone within these walls still remembers what courage sounds like.