

State university stands behind its principles

The University of Kansas gets a big, fat "A" for canning Paul Mirecki as chair of the religious studies department.

In e-mails sent to students about a new class designed, apparently, to debunk the "intelligent design" theory, Professor Mirecki proved himself to be a bigot and a boor. While he's apparently a top Bible scholar, he's not the stuff academic leaders are made of.

Intellectual and academic debate needs to stay at a high level, avoiding prejudice and slurs. Mr. Mirecki, despite his high office, stooped to insults and bigotry. He referred to right-wing Christians as "fundies," and said he would give them a "big, fat slap in the face."

It was pretty obvious, in discussions of the state Board of Education and its science standards, no views other than his would get much of an airing.

Our universities pride themselves on teaching and upholding values of tolerance and diversity. Too often, though, that means only so much diversity and tolerance only of views similar to the faculty's.

KU showed it means what it says, removing a chairman who obviously has little tolerance for anyone he disagrees with.

It's not that Dr. Mirecki isn't entitled to his opinions. He can say whatever he wants. As Chancellor Robert Hemenway pointed out, he's a tenured professor and he still has a job. He's just not leading the department.

Mr. Mirecki is making noises about suing the state, claiming that his rights to free speech have been abridged and his "career ruined." He's also mad at the Douglas County Sheriff's Department, whom he says is not pursuing his claim to have been beaten by men who referred to his statements about Christian groups.

Mr. Mirecki claimed the men followed him, then cut his vehicle off and beat him with their fists and a "metal object" somewhere near Lawrence.

He claims he's been "treated more like a criminal than a victim" since he reported the alleged crime.

Maybe they don't buy his claims about the beating?

It is hard to believe that kind of thing would happen in Kansas, but you never know. There could be right-wing Christians nearly as intolerant as this left-wing professor.

Paul Mirecki is no longer a department chair, and that's just as well. The bed sheets in his closet were showing.

The next step will be harder. As Christians, the people he insulted need to forgive him.

That won't get him his job back, but they'll prove they're better than at least one left-wing bigot.

Left or right, the university has proved it stands behind its values.

— Steve Haynes



It was all the snow's fault...

That's what happens when you get in a hurry and wear the wrong kind of shoes...

Saturday night, Jim and I were hurrying to get to town for a dinner. This was a nice party and I didn't want to wear my snow boots. I put on a pair of loafers with slick soles. I was going out to start the car when I stepped on a slick spot. And, as my girls used to say when they were little, "I fall down, go boom."

BOOM, it was. My feet went out from under me, my knee went one way, my ankle went the other, and I landed square on my dignity.

Jim was still in the house and without any witnesses, it did no good to cry. I lay there, in the snow, for a minute saying, "Oh, ow-w-w. Oh, ow-w-w."

The snow cushioned my fall, or I would have been hurt worse than I was. Of course, if it hadn't been for the snow, I wouldn't have fallen in the first place. It's a Catch-22.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



Bottom line (no pun intended), I wasn't really hurt, just my pride. Sunday I hobbled around and generally felt like I had been run over by a truck. I used my "condition" as an excuse to laze away the afternoon in my comfy recliner.

—ob—

Injured or not, though, Christmas is coming. And, I don't care if I'm politically incorrect by not saying "the Holidays" are coming. If you are offended by a Christian saying "Merry Christmas," then you better stop reading right now.

Tell you what. If you're an atheist, a Muslim, a Hindu, or whatever, I won't read your column, either. Deal?

For the rest of my readers, I'm making Christmas candy, making some Christ-

mas presents and generally getting in the mood to celebrate Jesus' birthday. I don't really think Christ was born Dec. 25, but that is the day set aside to celebrate it, and it's OK with me.

Since it's the season, I'll share one of Jim's favorite Christmas candies. It's also the simplest thing I make, so you're gonna love it.

Club Cracker Candy

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Have ready 1/2 cup of sliced almonds. You may also use chopped or ground almonds, or pecans.

Line a cookie sheet or jelly-roll pan with foil. Arrange Club Crackers (not saltines) on the foil, covering the entire surface.

In a small pan, bring to boil 1/2 cup sugar and 1/2 cup butter (not margarine). Boil about 2 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in 1 teaspoon vanilla. Pour over crackers. Sprinkle with the nuts. Bake for 10-12 minutes.

Let cool, break apart. Store in a tight container. Will keep for a long time.

Warning! They are addictive and you can't eat just one.

Support can help grieving loved one during holidays

The holidays are approaching, and while many people look forward to yearly traditions, gatherings with family and friends and the general good feelings associated with the season, some people dread the holidays. For those who have lost a loved one during the past year, the holidays may emphasize their grief.

The holidays, especially the first ones after losing a loved one, are especially difficult for one who is grieving. Often, friends and family members of those affected by a loss are unsure how to act or what to say to support their grieving loved one during the holidays.

Many people are not aware that Hospice Services is a valuable resource that can help people who are struggling with grief and loss. Hospice Services provides bereavement support to the families served by hospice and also offers services

to other members of the community as well.

Be supportive of the way the person chooses to handle the holidays. Some may wish to follow traditions; others may choose to change their rituals. Remember, there is no right way or wrong way to handle the holidays.

Offer to help the person with baking and/or cleaning. Both tasks can be overwhelming for one trying to deal with raw emotions.

Offer to help him or her decorate for the holidays.

Offer to help with holiday shopping or give your loved one catalogs or on-line shopping sites that may be helpful.

Invite the person to attend a religious service with you and your family.

Invite your loved one to your home for the holidays.

Help your loved one prepare and mail holiday cards.

Ask the person if he or she is interested in volunteering with you during the holiday season. Doing something for someone else, such as helping at soup kitchens or working with children, may help your loved one feel better about the holidays.

Donate a gift or money in memory of the person's loved one. Remind the person that his or her special person is not forgotten.

Never tell someone that he or she should be "over it". Instead, give the person hope that, eventually, he or she will enjoy the holidays again.

If he or she wants to talk about the deceased loved one or feelings associated with the loss, LISTEN. Active listening from friends is an important step to helping him or her heal. Don't worry about being conversational — just listen.

Remind the person you are thinking of him or her and the loved one who died. Cards, phone calls and visits are great ways to stay in touch.

In general, the best way to help those who are grieving during the holidays is to let them know you care. They need to be remembered, and they need to know their loved ones are remembered, too. Friends and family members should never be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, because making an effort and showing concern will be appreciated.

Hospice is a philosophy of care for patients with life-limiting illnesses. A team of professionals and trained volunteers offer care and comfort to patients and their families when a cure is no longer possible. Fully covered by Medicare and most insurance companies, hospice services are available at home or in a facility such as a nursing home. More information is available locally from Hospice Services, Inc. (785-543-2900 or 800-315-5122) or from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's Web site, www.caringinfo.org.

Scampering mice traumatize daughter

Oldest daughter called to say that she's been traumatized by a mouse.

A mouse? Give me a break, child. When you were a kid, you used to catch mice to feed the family snake. You've never been afraid of anything that crept, crawled or scampered.

But after I heard her story, I realized that a few visits to a therapist might be a good Christmas present — that or a nice bull snake.

Daughter said she was sitting at her desk in the living room working when her backpack/computer case fell on her foot. As she bent to pick it up, she realized there was a mouse under it.

It was a sad looking mouse, she said. It was wet and terrified.

This was not a surprise, since Sabine, queen of the three cats, was crouching beside it. It looked like Sabine and the mouse had been there for some time while daughter was working.

As daughter tried to get up, the mouse ran across her foot and Sabine nailed her with a pawful of claws. She apparently doesn't like anyone getting between her and her prey.

Son-in-law Nik likes small furry things and refuses to kill mice, so he brought out the live trap they use for these occasions.

"That mouse ran right into the trap," Daughter said. "I think he was really tired and just happy to get away from the cat."

Nik took the mouse to the back of their wooded property and let it go while Daughter finished up her work.

This was all very interesting, I told Felicia, but I didn't think that should have traumatized her, that was just a good reason to get a tetanus shot.

Open Season Cynthia Haynes



True, she admitted, but there was more. That night Louie, No. 3 cat, who sleeps with them, wouldn't settle down. He kept moving around. Then something ran across her face.

Daughter was still rattled by the mouse incident and made Nik turn on the light and check the bed.

There under her pillow was another mouse. Louie apparently had been playing with it on the bed.

Now, Daughter is not afraid of mice, but having one run across your face in the middle of the night is enough to give anyone a start.

Nik got the live trap out again and again the mouse seemed more than willing to get a free ride to the county line.

It wasn't even the same mouse, Daughter assured me.

She said she realizes that cats bring their prey in to show off, but usually, it's just a dead mouse.

She wasn't sure if she preferred a live or a dead mice in this case, she said. Rolling over in the middle of the night onto some dead thing didn't sound like it would be too much fun, either.

But what really bothers her is there's still Marcell, the No. 2 cat.

When will he be bringing her a gift?

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