

May 16, 2025

Dear Marie:

As you know, our mutual publisher and friend James Sherry contacted you recently to suggest that it is time to remove the things you and others posted about me in April 2019. It has been six years since the classroom issues—which did not involve you—that were the cause of the student social media campaign that led to the creation of “bwrecords2019.”

In our correspondence, James was succinct: “It’s time to take it down.” He tells me he spoke to you in person after your reading at Segue; then he followed up with emails but has not heard from you since. To repeat this request: it would be good for all to move on from the events of that period, and come to a better perspective on what happened at Wayne State.

The “blog” as it’s known—where there is no editor or publisher listed—brings together widely disparate issues, ostensibly in the name of calling me to account for them, but more often with the purpose of grievances or payback of all kinds, intellectual, aesthetic, academic. It’s a prime example of what is called “academic mobbing,” far in excess of any one issue.

As well, there was no attempt to publish the many students and faculty who could testify to having good experiences of working with me, over the course of 24 graduate seminars and 15 dissertations (at least one student tried). Nor was there any account of the support I helped provide you and others to come to Wayne State, nor any other positive interactions.

In your email you sent in April 2009, you mention your “enormous respect” for my work, and thus its relevance to yours, and a desire to remain friends, but there was a major misconstrual of our interaction in fall 2008. I’ll quote from your post, as it’s worth looking at again:

I’ve been feeling a bit uncertain about our professional relationship, given your ambivalence about my work when I was applying out last semester. To be blunt, I feel like you’re not necessarily supportive of me as a student or of my work in general, but rather of my work within particular contexts related to your departmental and scholarly goals. [. . .] Despite my enormous respect for your writing and thinking and teaching, I’ve decided to have another faculty member head my dissertation committee. I don’t want my

dissertation to be circumscribed by the same concerns or hesitations or conditionals that prevented your being able to write an enthused letter for me. [. . .] And I very much hope to maintain your friendship, despite whatever awkwardness I may be causing.

You'll recall we met twice after you asked for a letter; at the time, we were in the first semester of your being at Wayne. At first, I was taken aback as I had worked hard to recruit you, and it is true that I was hoping to build a focus on poetics in the department. At the same time, I was unsure where your request to leave was coming from, what other pressures you were under—likely tensions in the department from competing faculty.

My first response was hesitant. I suggested we meet again, at which point I said I would write a letter for you but that it would have to say we had not completed the seminar you were taking. And I did not think, for that reason, that the letter would be particularly effective. I'm sorry you felt I was “not necessarily supportive of [you] as a student or my work in general.” My ambivalence was about writing a letter in your first semester, without having seen any work.

The reason for my reaction to your email, I will now say, is that you believed there was an understanding that I was already your dissertation director. There wasn't. It was far too early for that, which should occur after several semesters. That impression, I believe, was being fed by department rivalries. I was also hurt, quite frankly, that you felt I was only interested in your work “within particular contexts related to your departmental and scholarly goals.”

I remember that, after I thought we had resolved the issue of our email exchange, I asked you to read with me in the department in 2010; I still have the flyer. I also invited you to participate in the German exchange program that semester, and I recall socializing after the ASAP conference reading in 2013. I thought we had moved past it.

In the document itself, you state that you “requested it not be acted upon in any way.” In fact, I knew nothing about it until your director, Jonathan Flatley, gave it to the interim chair in 2010. In the context of the Kathryn Lindberg case, I was shown, and responded to, a copy of the record, but perhaps you were not aware of this. Since you never made a formal complaint, you would not have known it had been resolved, and thus believed it had been ignored.

Had we discussed our interaction, from a mutual perspective we might have avoided what followed. Why that did not happen has everything to do with our department's factionalism and

Wayne State's administrative incompetence. What resulted, it is clear, is that you saw our interaction as a continuing injury, and that led you to publicize it, and your feelings, in 2019.

I am very sorry that I overreacted to your email; I should have let it go and tried to figure out what was going on as that could have happened. What I was trying to do was to resolve it; perhaps I felt more offended by what you said than I ought to have been. I was trying to get to a one-on-one conversation, which is what we ought to have had to begin with.

Uploading it to the "blog," on which it was read out of context by numerous people with no knowledge of the good, bad, or ugly of our department, however, is another matter. The document was reproduced in its entirety twice in the university inquiry, even though I answered for my part in it in 2010 (but again, you did not know that).

Without any context, it created quite an impression and led to the conclusion, publicized in a letter of reprimand by the dean, that I had violated vague AAUP ethical standards in our interaction. I disagree. You had made no formal complaint, and I had little opportunity to respond. You can find public criticism of the way Wayne State handled this case, addressing both the social media campaign and the lack due process, here: <https://bit.ly/3EFqWC3>.

There should have been another route to resolve these issues at the time—but there wasn't, and that is the point. It seems clear that this interaction—and you personally—were being used for reasons of department politics. What I can offer now is my sincere regret for my oversensitivity and overreaction, within the context of that volatility.

That said, after six years, your complaint has been registered. There is no further need for this interaction to remain visible, where it continues to be read out of context. It continues to damage me personally and professionally, and it also divides the poetry community and diminishes our graduate program at Wayne State. It reflects poorly on everyone concerned.

You said to James that you are not in touch with the organizers of the blog itself, which has no listed editor or publisher. If that is the case, you can still ask for the document to be removed by writing to the contact address: bwrecords2019@gmail.com. On my part, I will continue to seek removal of the "blog" itself as the case is closed and is destructive to any community.

Thank you for considering this request, Barrett