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10-year veteran political science instructor Dean Darris has taken professional leave while his Ph.D. has come under fire.

Darris takes leave

Political science instructor leaves Clackamas as the legitimacy of his doctorate accreditation comes into question

JOHN THORBURN

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Dean Darris announced late last week that he is taking a leave of absence effective immediately, along with a sabbatical this fall, from his political science classes.

The ten-year veteran instructor's departure comes amidst recent controversy surrounding the legitimacy of his doctorate.

Last Thursday, Darris told the *Print* that he was "leaving for personal reasons," but expressed the notion to his Honors Class students that he was leaving to represent himself legally in the event of a civil trial over the accreditation.

"I want it to be clear to everybody that I'm leaving under my own accord," said Darris. "I wasn't forced to leave. I wasn't asked to leave. This is my decision."

According to Darris, he has tentative plans to return to the classroom next winter or spring term.

The political science instructor's doctorate, which he received in 1998 from Berne University in the West Indies, has been declared an invalid degree by Alan Contreras of the State of Oregon Office of Degree Authorization [ODA].

Contreras' job is to look at instructors, professors and teachers around the state and verify whether degrees earned are in fact from accredited institutions. According to Contreras, he was asked by someone to check on the degree.

"I received a call from a person that asked that their name be kept confidential," noted Contreras. "I'm going to respect their wishes."

He feels that Darris' degree is not from an accredited school.

"All foreign universities are considered to be unaccredited because accreditation is a system setup in the United States," said Contreras. "There are ways, however, that a foreign institution can receive accreditation from our office. It simply needs to apply for Oregon accreditation."

According to Contreras, who was appointed the administrator of the state office last July, Darris has until April 30 to stop using his degree or he will turn the case over to the Oregon Attorney General's office.

When it comes to the question of the accreditation of Berne University on the island of St. Kitts in the Caribbean, Darris feels confident no matter what office is investigating.

During an interview that lasted more than an hour, Darris explained that Berne is accredited because it receives Title IV federal

funding from the United States Department of Education. Federal law states that any foreign institution that receives federal funding is deemed comparable to an accredited U.S. institution. He believes that this fact has been overlooked by Contreras and the ODA.

Darris would not go on record regarding the specifics of the case because he wanted to save his argument for a probable civil trial in the future.

The college recognizes the degree

When Darris received the Ph. D. from Berne in 1998, College President John Keyser evaluated the university and delivered a memo to the college's Human Resource Office.

In the memo, furnished to the *Print* by Darris, Keyser states: "I am pleased to evaluate this university favorably ... It is an overseas university like many who would not be accredited by our conventional regional accrediting organizations. It is accredited by the World Association of Universities and Colleges and the Accrediting Commission International ... I have every reason to believe that we should treat the Ph.D. program that Dean has completed in a comparable way to those of other colleges and universities."

I wasn't forced to leave. I wasn't asked to leave. This is my decision.

Dr. Dean Darris
Political Science Instructor

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A Special Report ... a look at Berne University

In light of Dean Darris' leave, the *Print* took a deeper look at the school that has come into question.

The following information was gathered by Shelbi Wescott from Darris, professors at Berne and its website.

Berne University, according to information on its website at www.Berne.com, is a small graduate university located in the Eastern Caribbean on the island of St. Kitts and has been a fully operational institution since 1993.

Dr. Dale Berne of New Hampshire founded the university with a mission to "produce global scholars ready to assemble their roles as world citizens,"

explains the site. Designed to accommodate working adults, students experience one-on-one attention from adjunct faculty which consists of Ph.D.'s from Oxford, Harvard, NYU, Carnegie-Mellon, Boston University and many other distinguished institutions.

When asked about Berne, Dr. Dean Darris provided *The Print* with names of professors there; one was Dr. Kenneth Fishell, retired, a former professor of Research Methods and Statistics at both the University of Vermont and

Berne. In a phone interview, Fishell told *The Print* that a three month residency on the island of St. Kitts is required to complete the doctoral program. During their three month stay, students endure a rigorous schedule of attending classes five days a week, eight hours a day. Students are expected to have the utmost integrity and professionalism during the intense residency.

Back at home, according to Fishell, students then complete 18 hours of on-line credit work related to their field of speciality. Each student is assigned

a faculty member to review the on-line work and has a supporting network of colleagues who can vouch for its academic integrity.

"The on-line portion of the program was very cutting edge for its time," stated Fishell. "It allowed people to continue their careers while attempting to obtain their Ph.D."

The final step in receiving a doctorate from Berne, according to Darris, is to write a dissertation which focuses on a unique aspect of the individual's doctoral pursuit. A dissertation is the fruit of the program, Darris said; it is a clear representation of the time and effort a student committed to his/her doctoral studies. His dissertation is entitled

American Democracy: Promise and Betrayal and is used in political science classes at community colleges in Oregon and Minnesota.

"Darris' dissertation can certainly stand the test of public scrutiny," Fishell said. "He is a bright young man with a promising career ahead of him."

An accredited university

Accreditation is defined by federal government on the U.S. Department of Education website as: The status of public recognition that a nationally recognized accrediting agency grants to an institution or educational program that meets the agency's established

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