

HUNGER STRIKE EMAIL AND ITS ADDRESSEES

Almost all addressees are faculty, both at W&M and elsewhere, and friends and faculty. Only five administrators at the College receive this email. The message is addressed to the Dept of Govt and the Faculty Assembly.

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----- Original Message -----

On Tuesday, January 15, 2019 7:33 PM, D <profdadessler2@pm.me> wrote:

On the eve of the first day of classes at William & Mary, where the crisis over faculty and student rights that emerged from my employment case only worsens, I write with a proposal to break the logjam.

On Thursday, January 31, I will again be sending a request to the Department of Government and the Faculty Assembly for the hearings I have been denied for over three years. They will be divided into three parts: one to look at faculty rights and two to consider the rights and freedoms of students. I will additionally propose a procedure all parties can use to stipulate facts and I will point out that, if we can agree that this procedure is fair and impartial, we need no other agreed definitions, methods, procedures, and so on, for the success of the hearings. This is because what divides the two sides is only an apparent, but not a plausible, difference in how the facts of these events should be understood.

It is time to bring this process to an end. The only thing that has been holding up justice has been the refusal by faculty on the Faculty Assembly and in the Department of Government to grant me due process hearings they have a moral and professional obligation to provide. Hearings would be straightforward and would, it is clear in light of known facts, bring to a quick end outstanding differences among faculty.

Therefore, when I announce the three-hearing proposal on January 31, I will also be declaring two new actions I will take if the Government Department and Faculty Assembly again persist in ignoring my requests and refuse to offer me or my students any hearing of any kind.

- First, I will drop the request for a hearing concerning faculty rights. I am willing to set my own claims for justice aside.
- Second, I will press forward with the two requested hearings on student rights and freedoms, and in so doing, I will announce that on Friday, March 1, 2019, I will begin a hunger strike that I will continue until conditions for both student hearings are granted.

I have studied hunger strikes with a fair degree of intensity for the last fourteen months. I have approached them from a number of angles: legal, political, medical, ethical, nutritional, and historical among them. I have discussed the possibility of pursuing this option with advisors, including general practitioners, psychiatrists, pastoral counselors, and an ethicist. I believe I have a solid understanding of the deep complexities and ethical difficulties presented by the hunger strike. I think I also have a good command of the hunger strike as a political tactic as well as a deep appreciation of the moral statement it can make.

March 1, 2019, the start of Spring Break at W&M this year, and the day I would begin my strike, happens also to be the 38th anniversary of the first day of the hunger strike of an IRA prisoner named Bobby Sands, who is perhaps history's most famous hunger striker. Sands' story and approach illustrate the appropriateness of a hunger strike in my situation. Sands was a political prisoner in Northern Ireland who had in 1981, while jailed, been reclassified by the British Government as a common criminal. He refused to accept the reclassification, since it implied he had done something wrong when he saw himself as defending political principle (the liberation of Irish Catholics from British rule).

My situation is similar to Sands' in this sense: because of many unfortunate actions taken toward me at William & Mary, including serious distortions of news stories, acquaintances and observers (many quite far from W&M) have concluded I must have done something wrong over the last three years here or I would not be in this situation. In fact, my entire approach from the day this crisis started in Oct 2015 has been geared to avoid this crisis, find an exit, and defend the rights of faculty and students.

The hunger strike I will begin exactly 38 years after Bobby Sands began his, if one becomes necessary for me, will be designed to make precisely this point. Sands achieved extraordinary success in getting his message about politics across when he was elected from his jail cell to a seat in the Irish Parliament about halfway through his hunger strike. (He was not a likely candidate for office before his strike.) There are few actions more effective than the hunger strike, given the right conditions, at separating society's morally upright pretenders from its more principled defenders of rights and freedoms.

Sands demanded exemptions from prison regulations that applied to convicts of a certain class. In effect, in undertaking his strike, he was asking that he be exempted from British prison law. That is quite a challenge to the ruling authorities. By contrast, I am--once again--merely asking that my rights under the United States Constitution, Federal law, and the Faculty Handbook be recognized by the faculty at William & Mary, who themselves have an interest in defending those rights.

Let me repeat that I have done my homework and I have a highly detailed, well-planned course of action, sensitive to the interests of many concerned groups, more than a year in the planning. It is intended, among other things, to protect my health as best as I possibly can. Successful hunger strikes (ones that end with a negotiated settlement that ends the fasting) often leave

hunger strikers with permanent disabilities. These can arise at fairly early stages of fasting. On my hunger strike, I will take water, salt, sugar, and vitamin B1, a combination meant to decrease the chance of permanent nutritional disability (neuropathy or congestive heart failure) in the short term. This approach extends the duration of negotiation with regard to the aims of the strike. This intake does, of course, like all hunger strikes, cause a progressive and eventually lethal protein and caloric malnutrition. However, it buys time. Since my aim is not to die, become a martyr, or maim myself with nutritional deficiencies, I am choosing the most responsible path I can find toward justice in this very unfortunate episode in the history of the College of William & Mary.

I very, very much do not want to go on a hunger strike this spring. I certainly do not wish to die. But no reader should doubt I will start my hunger strike at 12:01am, March 1, 2019 if it is my only remaining chance to get the hearing my students deserve and indeed must be provided them. Equally, no one should doubt my unyielding commitment to seeing this hunger strike through to the bitter end, once started, if that is the price the W&M faculty decide to impose on me for asking, one time too many, for a hearing they have every obligation to provide.

Thank you.

David Dessler
Department of Government

“HUNGER STRIKE” EMAIL

The Jan 15 email, written mainly to faculty, explained a proposal to settle outstanding issues between me and the faculty. Here are first three paragraphs broken down into an outline form.

1. On the eve of the first day of classes at William & Mary,
2. where the crisis over faculty and student rights that emerged from my employment case only worsens,
3. I write with a proposal to break the logjam.

4. On Thursday, January 31, I will again be sending a request to the Department of Government and the Faculty Assembly for the hearings I have been denied for over three years.
 - a. They will be divided into three parts:
 - i. one to look at faculty rights and
 - ii. two to consider the rights and freedoms of students.
5. I will additionally propose a procedure all parties can use to stipulate facts and
 - a. I will point out that, if we can agree that this procedure is fair and impartial, we need no other agreed definitions, methods, procedures, and so on, for the success of the hearings.
 - b. This is because what divides the two sides is only an apparent, but not a plausible, difference in how the facts of these events should be understood.

1. It is time to bring this process to an end.
2. The only thing that has been holding up justice has been the refusal by faculty
 - a. on the Faculty Assembly
 - b. and in the Department of Government
3. to grant me due process hearings
 - a. they have a moral and
 - b. professional obligation to provide.
4. Hearings would be
 - a. straightforward and would, it is clear in light of known facts,
 - b. bring to a quick end outstanding differences among faculty.

1. Therefore, when I announce the three-hearing proposal on January 31,
2. I will also be declaring two new actions I will take if the Government Department and Faculty Assembly again persist in ignoring my requests and refuse to offer me or my students any hearing of any kind.
 - a. First, I will drop the request for a hearing concerning faculty rights. I am willing to set my own claims for justice aside.
 - b. Second, I will press forward with the two requested hearings on student rights and freedoms, and in so doing, I will announce that on Friday, March 1, 2019, I will begin a hunger strike that I will continue until conditions for both student hearings are granted.

This email is a well-written policy proposal with a historical and theoretical analysis. It makes a constructive proposal in an unsettled conflict on campus; it does so clearly; it offers supporting analysis; it is not threatening; it makes clear its aim is the defense of principle and not melodrama or theater. It is well-timed. (Classes start the next day. I am drawing attention to students.)

I meant to teach people something about what a hunger strike is, so that they would realize this is an accepted form of civil disobedience. We know it is accepted because hunger strikers die heroes.

- I point out, I cannot give up on the rights of my students. I say I will give up my own rights.
- I explain a hunger strike is a form of protest someone accused of a crime can use to make clear he has not done something wrong, but is committed to a principle.
 - I give the example of Bobby Sands.
 - I say, “Acquaintances and observers (many quite far from W&M) have concluded I must have done something wrong over the last three years here or I would not be in this situation. In fact, my entire approach from the day this crisis started in Oct 2015 has been geared to avoid this crisis, find an exit, and defend the rights of faculty and students.”
 - In other words, I am not a criminal. I am fighting for principle. A hunger strike would make that clear.
 - I avoid all sensationalism.
 - I say my aim is not to die, become a martyr, or maim myself with nutritional deficiencies
 - I specify the nutritional approach I will take, noting that it will minimize the chances of permanent problems
 - I note that I am choosing the most responsible path I can find toward justice in this very unfortunate episode.
 - I note, “My entire approach from the day this crisis started in Oct 2015 has been geared to avoid this crisis, find an exit, and defend the rights of faculty and students.”
 - I say that I very, very much do not want to go on a hunger strike this spring. I certainly do not wish to die. But this is a matter of principle.

I have been trying to get faculty at William & Mary to consider the interests of students in this episode. I realize I may have to rely on a hunger strike because I am out of money. It may be all I can do.

I am a thoughtful person. I am a considerate person, even now, three and a half years into this brutal episode. I thought the strike would have to begin about March 1. Here are some choices I had:

1. Wait until March 1, say, “I am going on a hunger strike now and won’t eat until...”
2. Wait until Jan 31, say, “I will go on a hunger strike in four weeks if...”
3. Send an email explaining what a hunger strike is and warn the faculty that, on Jan 31, they will get a four-week warning.

I decide on avenue #3. It gives the faculty a chance to act without a hunger strike being threatened. That is fair. And maybe seeing that I am committed to the hunger strike would do the job. I am a decent, rational person. I don't want to issue what might sound like a spectacular threat if I don't have to.

Part of my thinking was to put in the record a clear account of the logic of a hunger strike. I didn't want people to think a hunger strike meant I was "mentally ill." The Bobby Sands story is interesting and I used it to good effect. No hunger striker has ever been seen as "mentally ill" by the public. A hunger strike is sometimes the only honorable option.

Let's look at that email's readability:

Words 1161.0
Words per sentence 22.7
Sentences 51.0
Syllables per word 1.5
Syllables 1798.0

The Flesch Kincaid Grade score of 11.5 shows that this text is readable by 12th Grade pupils (Aged 17 to 18)

The Flesch Reading Ease Score of 52.71 is as readable as Time Magazine

Look at this paragraph using Bobby Sands to explain the fundamental logic of a hunger strike.

Sands achieved extraordinary success in getting his message about politics across when he was elected from his jail cell to a seat in the Irish Parliament about halfway through his hunger strike. (He was not a likely candidate for office before his strike.) There are few actions more effective than the hunger strike, given the right conditions, at separating society's morally upright pretenders from its more principled defenders of rights and freedoms.

That's a good paragraph. It is a well-written email.

There is nothing in this email to indicate a deterioration of my mental health condition. On the contrary, the email suggests a high degree of functionality in quite difficult conditions. It explains clearly, among other things, that a hunger strike is a principled, honorable form of civil disobedience. This was to head off anyone who planned to depict such an act as "mentally ill."