

April 14, 2006

Mr. Joe Stork
Chair
Human Rights Watch, Middle East
1630 Connecticut Ave, NW 500
Washington DC 20009

Dear Mr. Stock:

Thank you for your support in the March 11th letter on the Dismissal of Claudia Kiburz of Zayed University. I would like to provide you with some of the details concerning my case. I have added some of them to this excerpt from the letter.

According to information provided to our committee, you ordered Ms. Kiburz's dismissal on February 7, 2006, several days after she had initiated a discussion in her class (the student's initiated the discussion on January 30th) regarding the controversial and insulting caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad (I explained to the class that these cartons would be considered "hate crimes" and "racist" by people in the many western countries. In fact the next day's lesson was entitled "Racist Cartoons".) that had appeared months earlier in a Danish newspaper and were later republished elsewhere (My students told me on the 30th that they had seen them on the Internet, already). During this discussion (I told the students on the 30th that we could continue the discussion on the 31st. I promised to research the topic. Because they are bilingual, I suggested that they should read both the English and Arabic Media reports about the caricatures.) Ms. Kiburz reportedly also displayed (on the 31st) to the students some (all 12) of the caricatures in question. (I asked that any student who wished to leave the room was welcome to do so, before I displayed the caricatures on a Proxima Projector.) A number of students complained to the university administration, (My students spoke to other students who were not in my class. Those other students went to an Egyptian woman, so I have been told, and they were crying. This woman wrote the letter for them.) and a text-message campaign against Ms. Kiburz apparently ensued.

1. *My lesson of the 31st included a handout of several news articles in English describing the background of the problem.*
2. *We referred to a model of a problem/solution essay in our textbooks.*
3. *I gave the students an Inspiration mind map framework for developing a problem/solution essay. The first hour of the class on the 31st was a discussion of the caricatures. AGAIN, I BEGAN THE LESSON BY SAYING THAT ANYONE COULD LEAVE IF THEY DID NOT WISH TO VIEW THE CARTOONS.*

SOLUTIONS

- 1. I focused on the fact that each of the caricatures was done by a different artist (Possible solution: send e-mails to those individuals and express ones disgust and state one views ... educate).*
- 2. I pointed out that three of the caricatures were actually critical of the Danish newspaper and its editor in particular. (Objective: "Know and understand what you are attacking.")*
- 3. I introduced the term "PR Stunt", as this was in one of the caricatures. (Vocabulary Relates to Media Unit)*
- 4. I reiterated that the caricatures were unacceptable to many people in the West on various grounds such as racial stereotyping (Strategy: Attack using the opponent's criteria).*

During the discussion on the 31st, about half the students did leave the room. I did see this as a potential problem, yet I felt it was within their rights as students, especially as I had given them the option to leave at the beginning of the lesson.

The students returned for the second hour. I assigned the Inspiration mind map as a class assignment. One student objected to the topic as "not relevant to the class". I explained that the next textbook unit would be on Media and Advertising and that the midterm writing prompt would address those issues. However I suggested that anyone, who wanted to, could write an essay on "Shopping Addiction" instead.

When the students came back to the University on February 4th, I told them that any student could change her topic, if she wanted to do so. On the afternoon of the 4th, my students wrote the first draft of their essays, each one using her own Inspiration mind map. I used a form of process writing which included reviewing an essay and highlighting mistakes, but not providing written corrections. I then recorded my comments on the essay using Audacity. I first gave organizational comments, and then read the essay as a native speaker. Each student used the recording of her essay to correct the grammar and structure of her essay. Fortunately, I have saved all the steps of the lesson and all the essays and recordings.

By Wednesday, February the 8th all of my students had completed an essay through a process of listening to the audio feedback and correcting several drafts. Seven of my students had completed the assignment and presented some solutions to the issue of the caricatures of the Prophet and eight of my students had completed an essay on Shopping Addiction. The irony is that the students who made the complaint against me had not been in my class (This was reported to me by the Provost Mr. Larry Wilson) and those students who had complained, resorted to a ghost writer to prepare their letter.

The lesson would have been applauded in many institutes as current, engaging, and relevant. The objectives and the outcomes were clearly defined. The lesson followed many of the objectives stated in the Level 7 Syllabus (see attached). I have also attached an essay done by one of my students.

I received notice of my dismissal on the morning of February 8th via the local newspaper. I did not contest the decision in the media because my students had already told me on January 30th that “the government of the U.A.E. would not allow anything bad to be printed.” Therefore I assumed that local newspapers could not question an edict handed down by His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, the Minister of Education. I had to complete preparations for the departure of my family, and I did not wish to jeopardize the remaining time which we had to pack and close our accounts in the U.A.E.

I did prepare a complaint to Dr. Hanif and emailed that to his administrative assistant.

Thank you again for your support of my case. I know that you are very busy, but I would like to know if you think that there is any way that I can contest my dismissal. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Claudia Kiburz

*Attached: Excerpt form Level 7 Syllabus
Sample Essay “RACISM CARTOON”*

.... Course Description:

In Level 7, you will use your skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking to investigate academic topics. You will examine issues from different perspectives. A major learning focus at this level is to critically examine issues and ideas. After obtaining information on a topic, you will plan and write an essay. You will also participate in classroom discussions and take notes from lectures ...

Course Goals/Academic Competencies:

By the end of the term, as a Level 7 student you should be able to:

Reading

- Identify and understand directly stated main ideas and details
- Identify problem/solution relationships between ideas
- ...
- Make accurate inferences of implied meaning and be able to distinguish fact from opinion
- ...
- Demonstrate an understanding of non-linear texts such as charts and graphs

Writing

- Write a well-structured and developed problem/solution and position essay of four or more paragraphs
- ...
- Paraphrase ideas to correctly represent sources and author's intent
- Provide simple in-text citations
- ...

Speaking

- ...
- Clearly present a point of view or position
- ...
- Participate actively and effectively in group academic discussions ...

“Caricature is a drawing that offers idea through a comment in the form of a joke or a laughing dialogue, which shows the contrast and the idea that the dialogue wanted to deliver.”(web site1). It is used to criticize the ruling regime. Also it appears in cases of the social reality. Moreover, it plays a main role in the defense of human rights, but some newspapers have used it in a wrong way and it has become a problem. On Friday the 30th September 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten published twelve caricatures insulting the Prophet Mohammed. The problem is the drawings of the prophet Mohammed in the Danish newspaper. The solutions to this problem are: boycotting Danish products and the Danish government apologizing by establishing rules.

Muslims in the entire world got angry because the drawings of the Prophet Mohammed were making fun of Islam. “The newspaper said that it was a way to challenge what it considered the intimidating tactics of fundamental Islamists.”(web site2). The Danish newspaper expected that the caricatures would not hurt the Prophet Mohammed, but were drawn because of Muslim fundamentalists affecting the freedom of expression in Denmark. Some Muslims disagree on the reason because the real message from that caricatures were to be critical of Islamic religion beliefs.

Boycotting Danish products is one of the solutions as a reaction to Denmark. Of course, making this decision early on encourages Muslims consumers to avoid buying Danish goods and to try to impact other Muslims in other areas by this decision. “For example, in the UAE many supermarkets, Spinneys and Co-operative Union withdrew Danish products from their shelves.”(newspaper3). Also many other Muslims participated in boycotting Danish products. This decision worried Danish industries which would be affected by this.

The second solution is Denmark should apologizing by establishing rules. The Danish government and JYLLANDS-POSTEN NEWSPAPER should apologize to all Muslims in the world and close this newspaper to be a lesson to anyone to avoid putting themselves in this situation. The Danish government should reprimand this private newspaper and give them lessons to respect other religions. Also, freedom of speech has its limits when it affects others.

In conclusion, caricature has positive and negative effects. However, newspapers should only publish the last events of economic, racism, policy and social problems between countries to keep the world at peace. The best solution for the drawings of Prophet Mohammed is a boycott of Danish products because it affects the country, and then the Danish government will feel how sad it is to lose trust and relationships between countries. Finally, apologizing and boycotting are solutions for the problem of the drawings of the Prophet Mohammed.

Sources:

1. <http://sanabes.com/forums/showthread.php?t=13729>
2. Newspaperindex.com
3. Emirates Today newspaper.