

## **Setting the Record Straight - Dr. Habegger July 29, 2009**

By now you have all heard some of the news stories about Dr. Wendy Habegger, an Assistant Professor of Finance here at the University of West Florida. Most of the reporting has been highly inaccurate, so UFF-UWF is providing accurate information to set the record straight.

The issue involves an extra credit assignment that Dr. Habegger offered to a Finance class. The optional assignment grew out of a discussion of the merits of the Bush stimulus package, which involved having the students engage in discretionary spending in order to try to “save the economy” (the students’ terminology, not ours). While a particular local establishment was named as one place in which students could engage in discretionary spending, the students had the freedom to patronize any local business for any amount of money (there was no “minimum amount”), as long as the result was “discretionary spending.” Some students purchased services at the named establishment, but others took their discretionary spending elsewhere and received the extra credit. The result of this situation is the subject of grievances for reasons beyond the particular assignment in question.

The University has investigated this situation twice, first as a Step 1 grievance and again as a Step 2 request for review. In the Step 2 findings, the investigating officer did not find any unethical or criminal behavior. There was no relationship between Dr. Habegger and the named local business and she received no benefit from the assignment, other than seeing her students put their learning into practice. Dr. Habegger has been publicly accused of unethical and illegal behavior even though the situation has been investigated and there are findings to the contrary.

The media accurately reported that Dr. Habegger’s employment at UWF will terminate as of January 2010. However, UWF has used the non-reappointment process rather than a disciplinary termination—again, implying that no wrongdoing occurred. It is strange, however, that the University chose not to reappoint the 2007 winner of the Distinguished Teaching Award.

What is happening to Dr. Habegger could happen to any of us. Habegger is fortunate that our union is advocating for her within the university, with the state attorney’s office, the Ethics Commission, and in the public eye. If she were not a member, however, Dr. Habegger, would have to pay her own legal expenses for any criminal or administrative charges. In other words, membership doesn’t cost – it pays.

We at UFF are very curious as to why the University has not been willing to make any public statement to defend one of its own faculty members. While Dr. Habegger’s reputation is being damaged by the publicity, so is that of the University—and, by extension, the reputation of all of us who work here. UFF-UWF is working to minimize the damage from this situation.

As always, we will be happy to hear from you. You may contact the Grievance Officer by e-mail ([gbaugh@uwf.edu](mailto:gbaugh@uwf.edu)) or by telephone (474-2206). We encourage you to become a member of UFF (see attached membership form or consult our website, [www.uff-uwf.org](http://www.uff-uwf.org)) so that you will benefit from the protection that is now being offered to Dr. Habegger.