
Fwd: A note of thanks and an apology to all.

2 messages

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From: **D Dessler**

Date: Fri, Sep 8, 2017 at 10:24 PM

Subject: FWD: A note of thanks and an apology to all.

To: dadessler

Dear Former Students,

I sent this email an hour ago to several faculty. Much of it applies to you as well. I hope you don't mind me sharing it with you.

Best wishes for a great semester.

Prof Dessler

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September 8, 2017 9:00pm

Today is the one-year anniversary of the sending of the letter everyone calls "FSM," an acronym that is itself a tribute to the commanding stature of its authors. How many faculty (at any university) could write a letter like the one they wrote, in the circumstances they faced, and have people immediately recognize its importance not because of what it said, but because of who said it?

I thought this would be an appropriate moment to say something about the many difficult emails I wrote this summer. I wish I hadn't sent them. I know I hurt people. I cannot tell you how sorry I am for my errors. Without trying to excuse myself, I can only say that I was isolated and facing conditions that meant living in constant fear of arbitrary arrest. Every knock on the door terrified me. I doubt that the young VCU graduate going house to house in my Richmond neighborhood in July to raise money for Environment Virginia has ever scared a professor the way she did me.

Living a solitary existence with the relentless dread and apprehension of possible arrest 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a period that lasted from early May to mid-July, was a distressing, corrosive, and even deforming experience. But I honestly do not mean to be making excuses. I don't doubt most faculty would have done better than I did in these circumstances.

The most dismal emails I wrote were as hurtful and damaging to me as they were to anyone else, and I still live in the shadow of the torment of those weeks. However, it is the effect on not me but others—on all of you—that bothers me the most.

If there is any good news in this story, it is that I survived this period and indeed seem to have gained strength from it. I overcame this adversity not least because I never lost confidence that I retained everyone's support and friendship, despite my objectionable behavior.

Once again, hats off to Feiss, Slevin, and Meyers for the strength, courage, and dedication to William & Mary they put on display one year ago today.

It is easy to forget (except perhaps for me) that Geoff, Kate, and Terry wrote that letter at a time and under conditions that meant taking an enormous risk to defend a single faculty member under great duress, with little or no promise of reward to them for their efforts.

I thank you all for your remarkable patience with me during these most confusing, challenging, and yet hopeful of times.

Sincerely,
David Dessler