

August 9, 2007

Dr. Karen J. Viechnicki, Provost
Capella University
225 S. 6th Street, 9th Floor
Minneapolis, MN 55402

AUG 27 2007

Dear Dr. Viechnicki:

The Commission has received a formal complaint from Ms. ^{Redacted by HELP Committee}, who appears to a current or former student of the University. Ms. ^{Redacted by HELP Committee}'s central allegation is that Capella's own system, particularly the behavior of its mentors, contributed to her inability as a student to continue to make reasonable academic progress.

I informed Ms. ^{Redacted by HELP Committee} that the purpose of the Commission's complaint process is to ascertain whether there are widespread problems at an accredited institution that might have implications for its ongoing ability to meet the Commission's Criteria for Accreditation or that indicate that institutional improvements are necessary. The Commission does not resolve, mediate or otherwise intervene in disputes that arise between individuals and institutions regarding alleged problems that an individual has experienced in his/her relationship with that institution or one of its faculty members. Also, the Commission's complaint process is not intended to act as an appellate process for an academic decision or to provide particular remedies, such as tuition refunds or other monetary damages, for individuals who believe that they have been injured by an institution. Individuals interested in seeking review of specific institutional decisions must look to appellate processes within the institution or to other processes external to the institution. The intent of the complaint process in most cases is to ask an institution to look critically at itself to determine whether improvements in policies or in implementation might be appropriate rather than to punish or to chastise the institution for errors it may have made in the past.

The Commission's Criteria for Accreditation do require that an institution create an effective learning environment for its students. Clearly in a learning environment where individual mentoring is a central component and necessary for learning to proceed according to the learning plan, mentors are a critical component. Therefore I am asking the institution to discuss how it identifies mentors, monitors how well they work with students and assesses how effective such mentors are in facilitating students' progress in completing their learning plans. As we are aware, mentors in a distance delivery environment often have full or part-time employment relationships with other institutions, which may, without clear institutional protocols and follow-

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up, complicate their ability to be responsive to students. Please include any relevant faculty policies, institutional protocols or other documents that support your position. While I would expect that you would primarily address these issues as they affect all students, please comment on Ms. ^{Redacted by HELP Oc}s particular circumstances.

I am asking for your response within 30 days of your receipt of this letter. Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,
Redacted by HELP Committee

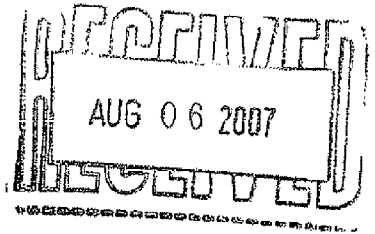
Assistant Director for Legal and Governmental Affairs

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Redacted by HELP Committee

August 1, 2007

The Higher Learning Commission
30 North LaSalle Street, Suite 2400
Chicago, Illinois 60602-2504



Dear Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Commit}

I have previously forwarded to you by email polices that I have from Capella University and emails that I have sent and emails I have received from the University over the past couple of years while in pursuit of my Ph.d. This letter is the official summary of my complaint against the University that I hope the Higher Learning Commission will take into account and hold the University responsible for what I see as their complete failure to follow through on promises they made through policies in their catalog and the promises made in person.

I started attending Capella in February 2003 and completed the actual coursework with the University in the Spring of 2004. At that time I started my comprehensive stage of the program and then started the dissertation phase of the program in Spring of 2005. I originally was assigned to Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Committee} to be my mentor. After completing the first course HS9996 with Dr. ^{Redacted by HI} in the Summer of 2005 I was informed with the start of HS9997 in October of 2005 that he was moving onto a different position with Capella and all of his mentees would be transferred to another mentor.

I was originally assigned to Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Committee} who was going on medical leave. I had sent her my proposal and then didn't hear from her for over a month. When I finally did make contact with the school they were unaware that she was on medical leave. When the school made sure she contacted her new mentees, she arranged a telephone conference with me. She then called at the wrong time and lambasted me on my answering machine for not being there at the prescribed time. I pointed out to her numerous times that I was in the Central Time Zone. When I returned her call she informed me she was busy because she had scheduled another phone conference with another student – at the time we were supposed to meet, so she had scheduled two students for the same time. Yet she yelled at me for not being present when I wasn't the one who got the phone call time wrong. When we did finally get to speak she informed me that she wasn't interested in my proposal because it wasn't her "area." I contacted Capella informing them that I didn't think that the mentor on my committee should be so uninterested in my project and they allowed me to be reassigned once again.

I was then assigned to Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Com} in December of 2005. I immediately introduced myself to him and sent him my proposal. He emailed back explaining that he had course papers to grade and he had some family functions around Christmas including some deaths in the family and would I mind terribly if he put off reading my proposal until January. I agreed and expected to hear from him in January. I continuously emailed him in January, through February and into March with absolutely no response from him. I finally contacted the school about his absence. I was emailed by the Department Chair Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Co} that afternoon and I received a phone call

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from Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Com} that afternoon as well. His comment to me on the phone was "I don't know what you really want me to do with this proposal" He is the mentor of this project, he is the one that is supposed to indicate whether it is sufficient to be sent to the committee and then onto the proposal defense I am shocked that he had no idea what to do. That is supposed to be something covered in their training before they become mentors. They are supposed to know what they are doing. When I explained to him what he should be doing, he indicated to me that he would have notes to me by the weekend. A week went by a second week went by and I still hadn't heard from him. I sent him emails during this time. I called the school again about his absence. I finally got notes from him after contacting the school the second time.

We finally managed to then have a second phone conference where he indicated that I needed to change my entire methodology of the project. This phone conference took place in June. I then accepted a new position and was forced to move half way across the country so I requested to take my one quarter off that I was allowed to. I made my move and then rewrote my entire proposal. When I started class again, Capella by this time required me to be on a contract and if I didn't finish within the next quarter I would be expelled from the school for failure to move forward in the class I was in. Even though Capella was aware that I had disappearing mentors for three quarters I was still going to be kicked out by December if I didn't move forward onto HS9998.

When I returned to class in October, I sent my newly revised proposal to Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Com} along with all of the other supporting documentation that I needed including the IRB and an approval letter from the research site. I sent that proposal to Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Com} on October 6th. I did not hear from Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Cor} until November 6th when he informed me that he was busy working on an important project that Capella had assigned to him.

Now Capella was aware that this mentor had problems keeping up with his workload because I had to complain about him no less than two times and yet they assigned him an additional project? Dr. ^{Redacted by HELP Com} also seemed to have quite a few family emergencies in the last year he had deaths in the family in December and again in May. It must have been a very trying time for him so I wonder why Capella didn't lighten his load and instead gave him more to do even though he wasn't keeping up with what he was already required to do.

I received a threatening letter from Capella as well when I complained to them about my mentor, which I unfortunately do not have a copy but under FERPA laws it should be in my student file and if it isn't there Capella is doctoring those files as well. The letter informed me that the mentor issue was mine and mine alone to handle and that Capella was not going to entertain anymore complaints about my mentor. That I really don't see as a student centered learning environment. When I started experiencing problems with the mentor again in October of 2006, I didn't feel I could turn to anyone to help.

I was a 4.0 student, I as you can see was no where near that limit of 7 years total enrolled in the school and yet from the way I have been treated, ignored, and threatened I don't feel this school deserves to be reaccredited. I am sure there are a number of students that have had similar experiences and I don't see Capella trying to make amends or change, or keep control over their employees or faculty. If they want to be an online school they need to have more accountability

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as far as student contact. When a student can't get their mentor to answer an email they should be able to call the school and ask why. They should be able to have some other contact information for the mentor other than an email and a cell phone he never answers. A student should be able to get a response from the school that doesn't threaten them. This school has done a very poor job of staying in contact with their students, and I don't think they deserve to be accredited unless they address this issue.

Sincerely,
Redacted by HELP Committee

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