

SAVE OUR SHORTER

March 26, 2012

Dear Shorter University Trustee,

Save Our Shorter is a movement comprised of alumni, students, former faculty, friends of Shorter and Rome citizens. We are people who love Shorter University and prize its legacy as a liberal arts college. We trust that you likewise, value Shorter's heritage and traditions. We sincerely hope that her best years lie before her; however, current trends at the university, the discontent of faculty, staff and students, and the rapid departure of so many of the faculty and staff have given us reason to wish to address you in this way.

When, in 2005, the Georgia Baptist Convention won the lawsuit with Shorter University, Dr. Nelson Price assured faculty, staff and students that nothing would change. Some of what we hoped and expected would happen under Dr. Harold Newman's guidance came to fruition. Enrollment grew, financial stability was achieved and Shorter became a full-fledged university. However, other changes have destabilized the institution and have, despite what you may hear, caused fear and intimidation to reign.

Dr. Don Dowless and Dr. Price will tell you that they embrace academic freedom and academic integrity. Indeed, in a speech by Dr. Price in the Shorter Chapel on January 31, 2006, Dr Price told Shorter students and faculty, "The academic world is one in which the intellect is intended to be fed. That is the reason for institutions of higher learning. That is why Shorter was founded and a primary reason for its existence. "Academic freedom is the crown jewel of the world of academia and it must be preserved. The best preservative of academic freedom is academic integrity." Dr. Price went on to give his interpretation of academic integrity, "That is, persons teaching in an institution based on certain tenants should manifest academic integrity and avoid undermining the tenants advocated by the affiliated supporting body" However, according to the Center for Academic Integrity, academic integrity is comprised of 5 fundamental values:

- **Honesty.** The quest for truth and knowledge requires intellectual and personal honesty in learning, teaching, research and service.
- **Trust.** Academic institutions must foster a climate of mutual trust in order to stimulate the free exchange of ideas.
- **Fairness.** All interactions among students, faculty and administrators should be grounded in clear standards, practices and procedures.
- **Respect.** Learning is acknowledged as a participatory process, and a wide range of opinions and ideas is respected.
- **Responsibility.** A thriving community demands personal accountability on the part of all members and depends upon action in the face of wrongdoing.

We are asking you to show academic freedom and academic integrity not through the GBC lens, but through the lens of academia, as it should be. This is what you vowed you would do as trustees of this institution. We should not have to remind you that your fiduciary responsibility is not to the GBC, but to Shorter herself.

Specifically, we object to the following personnel and policy issues:

- As the President of Shorter University, it is incumbent on Dr. Dowless to communicate with all constituencies of the university. It should be expected that he communicate in a civil, non-accusatory, and non-demeaning manner. He has failed to do that. (See Laura Floyd statement)
- Dr. Dowless has refused to have dialog with Rome citizens, clergy and alumni despite his public statements to the contrary. He has assigned that role to Mr. Epting – in itself a poor leadership decision, since Mr. Epting has just recently been hired. Dr. Newman’s door was always open to anyone who wished to speak with him.
- Two well-respected staff members, both Shorter grads, were dismissed without due cause but for ideological reasons, despite the fact that they had signed the Personal Lifestyle Statement. While the firings are within the rights of the administration, to lose two dedicated individuals who have the love of Shorter at heart and who had defended the actions of the administration to their constituencies is shameful. We are seeing embarrassing consequences within the Rome community for those actions.
- Faculty search guidelines as outlined in the Faculty Handbook are being ignored while a contentious and dictatorial administration defies the faculty to speak up.
- A total of 40 faculty and staff have left or announced their intention of leaving Shorter this year. Many more are expected to leave before the beginning of the next academic year.
- The School of Fine and Performing Arts, which has been called the “Conservatory of the South” and which, incidentally, just produced the national winner of the Music Teacher’s National Association competition has been gutted, with both students and professors leaving because of the censorship guidelines that have been mandated. NASM has been notified of potential violations of its standards and loss of accreditation is highly possible
- The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has been notified of the censorship of materials and the repression of academic freedom that is a hallmark of Dr. Dowless’ administration. The AAUP may censure Shorter if they have evidence of the above charges. You should be aware that North Greenville and Charleston Southern are under censorship by the AAUP. While the current

administration may not find this significant, in the broader academic community considers the opinion of the AAUP quite the opposite.

- Over 30 third party complaints have been filed against Shorter with SACS. Again, while this might be dismissed by Dr. Price and Dr. Dowless, we remind you that, to quote the Georgia Supreme Court from the 2005 decision, “The controversy was precipitated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which questioned the College's independence and threatened its accreditation because the power to select trustees was vested in GBC. And from the dissenting opinion, “The majority opinion holds that Shorter College's Board of Trustees complied with its governing documents, the Georgia Nonprofit Corporation Code,¹ and its fiduciary duties in dissolving the College and transferring its assets to the Shorter College Foundation.” In other words, the court affirmed that SACS did, in fact, threaten accreditation because of undue influence of the GBC.
- More than a few professors fear for their jobs, but with the dissolution of the Faculty Senate, they have no voice to express their dissatisfaction and their anger.

Dr. Dowless and Dr. Price have clearly underestimated the academic community and Rome community's tolerance for the dramatic shift away from academic freedom and the heritage of Shorter University. Major donors and foundations have either withdrawn their contributions or are seriously contemplating doing so. Donors who have already fulfilled their pledges have vowed that because of the direction currently being followed by the administration, they will never support Shorter again. Those losses will be substantial.

Surely, you cannot believe that the loss of so many faculty and staff, the reputation that Shorter is gaining among donors and alumni, the risks that may be posed to various accreditations, and the fear and intimidation that is pervasive throughout much of the campus is good for the university. We call upon you, the Shorter Board of Trustees, to be mindful of your fiduciary responsibility to the university, to be fully informed on all decisions made at this board meeting and to realize that you are accountable to Shorter, her students, her faculty, her staff, her alumni and to the greater Rome community. We thank you for serving our Shorter.

With respect,

Save Our Shorter

Mr. Samuel Hope, Executive Director
NASM
11250 Roger Bacon Drive, Suite 21
Reston, VA 20190-5248

Dear Mr. Hope,

The purpose of this letter is to express my concern regarding the music department at Shorter University. Shorter University's new president, Dr. Donald Dowless, has mandated limitations for the music department that fall away from NASM standards.

The limitations on the music department are:

- No profanity
- No overt sexual references
- No texts that in any way suggest that alcohol is a good thing or a fun thing
- No texts that belittle, question or otherwise discredit Christianity or the Bible
- Nothing that can be considered homoerotic

Recently, the music department at Shorter planned to produce the opera L'Elisir d'Amore. When Dr. Dowless discovered by reading some promotional material about the opera that it contained a reference to alcohol, he demanded the opera be withdrawn from production.

Here are just a few standard operas that, because they contain overt sexuality and/or the use of alcohol, may now potentially be banned from study and/or performance at Shorter University:

- Carmen
- Falstaff
- La Traviata
- Romeo et Juliette
- Cavalleria Rusticana
- Rigoletto
- Le Nozze di Figaro
- Il Barbiere di Siviglia
- Faust
- Candide
- Othello

In section IX, A.1, part 3A (page 103 of the NASM handbook), the standard states, “voice performance majors must demonstrate comprehensive capabilities to prepare performances at the highest possible level and knowledge of applicable solo literature.”

In section VIII, B.1.b, Common Body of Knowledge in the NASM handbook (page 101), the standard for voice performance includes, “an understanding of the repertory in their major performance area and the ability to perform a cross-section of that repertory.”

Page 102 of the handbook states, in part, “curriculum structure shall enable students to develop the range of knowledge expected of those holding a professional baccalaureate degree in performance.”

Because the study and performance of a vast repertoire of opera is now banned at Shorter University, NASM’s standards of “essential competency” and “range of knowledge” can no longer be met.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Susan Nicely

Shorter College, Class of 1978, BM, voice performance

November 7, 2011

To Dr. Donald Dowless and the Shorter Board of Trustees,

Today is a sad day for me and for so many who have long loved Shorter University. I grieve as a child at the loss of a parent. I grieve for all of us who are losing our school and are ashamed of the actions of the past few days and weeks and ashamed to claim Shorter as our alma mater. I shall attempt to be as brief and as positive as possible.

Allow me to offer an analogy that may illustrate how we are interpreting your recent actions. On stage, an actor has to consider carefully how his/her actions on stage "read" to an audience: "Do my actions 'read' to the audience as I intend?" Your ongoing actions and total lack of communication read as follows to the alumni, faculty, students, and friends of Shorter: "We do not care how you feel. We do not care about you. We do not care about the faculty. We do not care about the traditions of your school. We really do not care about quality education. We do not care that you have poured your life and your career into Shorter." Is this truly your intent? I certainly hope not, but this is our perception.

Is this how the Georgia Baptist Convention walks in love? What your actions are communicating, intentional or not, reads like political control rather than moral high ground.

If you are a new friend and supporter of Shorter, you most certainly need to be aware of how for 138 years, the school of the arts has attracted attention, support from donors, and top quality students for every area of the college. The music and theater departments are the signature of Shorter. The fact is that even when there are those who find disagreement with Shorter, the performing arts division of the school has been the publicly visible "Shorter" which brings support and national recognition to our University. Artistic performance from our amazing students has drawn praise and recognition from the local community, state and region, as well as from professional musicians and artists nationwide. (I might add that the schools you are seeking to "be like" receive little or no national recognition.) The proof is in the numerous awards the School of the Arts and its students have received, including Metropolitan Opera winners, Music Teachers National Association winners, National Association of Teachers of Singing winners, The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, to name only a few, and recently, an

invitation for Shorter's nationally renowned Chorale to perform this coming March at American Choral Director's Association Conference. These have been accomplished with some of the worst facilities in the state, by the way.

However, the unfortunate decision of the trustees to implement this lifestyle statement sends a powerful message of mistrust to this virtually irreplaceable faculty. The tragic consequences will be the dismantling of the School of the Arts, specifically music and theater. It is a tragic that those who are implementing these policies have no real appreciation for or understanding of the distinctiveness of Shorter's musical heritage, which will forever destroy what has been established. Shorter will then be known as a place where true artistry is not valued, and a place with which a truly artistic teacher would not want to be associated. I can assure you that you will never be able to rebuild what you have lost. You seem to have no idea of the quality that you have inherited in this faculty. I am flabbergasted that you have not embraced them and given thanks for this incredible treasure at Shorter, which few schools possess.

The department for which Shorter graduates are highly prized nationwide is quickly dissolving at this writing. Please carefully consider the consequences of your actions:

- Highly gifted and qualified faculty are already seeking new positions
- Top potential students in the arts will go elsewhere
- Recruitment of great students is already at a standstill
- Many current music and theater students are already planning to transfer
- Rising seniors, and to some extent juniors, who came to Shorter to study with this great faculty, will be stuck at an inferior school.

The distinguishing mark of Shorter's music and theater departments will be no longer be greatness, but the mediocrity of the schools you are choosing to emulate. If students who are currently attending Shorter, as well as alumni, particularly in the area of fine arts, had desired a Bob Jones or a North Greenville University atmosphere, they would have chosen those schools to begin with. They chose Shorter precisely because of its unique reputation, which you seem determined to destroy.

An additional sadness of mine is that you are so sure that all of your actions are to the glory of God. What I see is that Satan is celebrating the rancor and sheer bitterness that these actions have engendered. Many of the issues you are addressing are indeed founded in sound doctrine. But, as you are aware, there is

much division over doctrine in the Church. Is it not more Christ-like, when there is division, for Christians to cry out to God for revelation in unity, rather than succumbing to the hatred that is dividing us? Surely all of us need to repent for our lack of love and compassion for one another. Did Jesus not pray for unity for believers in John 17? Truly, what kind of missions do you hope to accomplish if the very people you say you want to reach for Christ have all left? There is, I agree, a need for morality.

“Indeed, love must be accompanied by moral standards. Without them, love is reduced to sentimentality alone. The application of Biblical standards must indeed be the guide to true love. An unjust order prevents or hinders the fulfillment of God-intended destiny. However, Love is the compassionate identification with others that seeks their good. Their good is defined by God’s intended destiny for them. Love only flourishes in a just order.

This ideal of compassionate identification with the other that seeks their good is only possible by the transforming work of Jesus in our lives, by the power of the Spirit.” (Daniel Juster, “The World Needs Love”)

I believe that you could agree with me on the above. I assume that you would not want to “prevent the fulfillment of God-intended destiny” for anyone. However, it is, at least in part, your approach to these issues, and your presentation, with its disregard for this “compassionate identification with others”, which is at fault here. The current music faculty has chosen Shorter, not in spite of, but because of its Christian heritage. They most assuredly have not chosen Shorter because of salary, but because of its amazing heritage and its wonderful student body. Your faculty cannot, however, function under the cloud of suspicion and of fear which you have created.

Indeed, the world is spiraling out of control, reflected by the acceptance of the lifestyle of the rich and famous—the lifestyle of Hollywood. The loss of morality in this nation is appalling. However, negative backlash is hardly the answer. The Lifestyle Statement, in particular, reads negatively to most of the faculty, and it assumes behavior on their part that does not reflect Christian values. The fine arts faculty is already imposing restrictions on themselves and their students, but your documents insult their efforts. We already have a “Great High Priest” in Jesus who deals with all, not just some, aspects of immoral behavior for those who “have ears to hear.” So there is really no need for such a document at all. Rather than forcing the signing of documents, which does not change hearts or lives and has disenfranchised the faculty, why not pray for the compassion of the Holy Spirit to

bring conviction, love and transformation that the new motto suggests to Shorter? If you feel that guidelines are really necessary, place the statement of faith and message worded with love and respect for differences, in the faculty handbook where it belongs. Treat the faculty with the trust and respect that you want for yourselves as trustees and administrators.

I do understand that you see a need to “protect your flock.” However, in this case, the cure is worse than the disease. The evidence is in the alienation, frustration and even hatred that these actions have stirred. Does this look like the work of the Holy Spirit? You know, one of the most orderly places you can go is a cemetery! The letter of the law leads to death, but the Spirit is Life! You can know scripture, but without the Spirit, you will never make progress in the Lord. The Pharisees, as you know, were masters at producing rules. But result was death. The forced impositions of these kinds of rules, even if they are well intended, are producing a spirit of death: the opposite of what you are attempting to do. Trusting the Spirit to transform lives would produce a far better result.

Many have attempted your approach in the past. Historically, so-called Christians have attempted the annihilation of the Jewish people for 2,000 years in trying to force salvation upon them, thus alienating them from the Truth. Martin Luther even turned on them and promoted their expulsion from Germany, opening the door to the Holocaust in the 20th C. I realize that this is a bold analogy, but the spiritual warfare at work here is the same. This warfare must be conducted, not in the flesh, as with the forced signing of a document (or the forced conversion of the Jew), but with the sword of the Spirit. Would it not be better to have the trustees, friends and students of Shorter engage in how to hear God for themselves, with the whole of the Scripture, not just selected portions of the New Testament, as the guide? Allow the Holy Spirit bring the direction needed.

All of this public humiliation and embarrassing press concerning Shorter could have been avoided in these ways. God would be glorified on our campus and it would be a place of “Transforming Lives Through Christ” that it has been and can become. Again, no thinking faculty member or student will ever be transformed at the point of a sword. A document changes nothing within. Shorter should be a place where Christ is honored, but at the same time, should be a welcoming place of diversity, so that those who are of differing backgrounds and convictions may receive quality instruction and might experience Jesus’ command to “love one another as I have loved you.”

Thousands of alumni are grieving alongside faculty, students and friends of Shorter over what will surely result in the loss of our school. Is this really your intent? If so, I grieve for those of you who are caught in this situation as a result of listening to the wrong voices. If this is not your intent, I urge your immediate attention to the terrible consequences of your actions and to the rescinding of these statements. Time is of the essence. Do you really want to be known as the President and Board of Trustees responsible for the destruction of fine arts, as well as the other fine departments, at Shorter?

Will you allow pride to stand in the way of doing the right thing? For the sake of the heritage of Shorter, please take action.

Prayerfully and respectfully submitted,

Warren Kennedy

Class of '71

The Creed of Zeta Tau Alpha:

To realize that within our grasp, in Zeta Tau Alpha, lies the opportunity to learn those things which will ever enrich and ennoble our lives; to be true to ourselves, to those within and without our circle; to think in terms of all mankind and our service in the world; to be steadfast, strong, and clean of heart and mind, remembering that since the thought is father to the deed, only that which we would have manifested in our experience should be entertained in thought; to find satisfaction in being, rather than seeming, thus strengthening in us the higher qualities of the spirit; to prepare for service and learn the nobility of serving, thereby earning the right to be served; to seek understanding that we might gain true wisdom; to look for the good in everyone; to see beauty, with its enriching influence; to be humble in success, and without bitterness in defeat; to have the welfare and harmony of the Fraternity at heart, striving ever to make our lives a symphony of high ideals, devotion to the Right, the Good, and the True, without a discordant note; remembering always that the foundation precept of Zeta Tau Alpha was Love, "the greatest of all things." -- Written by Shirley Kreasan Strout, adopted by the 1928 ZTA Convention

Mission Statement:

To make a difference in the lives of our members by developing the potential of each individual through innovative programming, which emphasizes leadership development, service to others, academic achievement and continued personal growth for women, with a commitment to friendship and the future based on the sisterhood, values and traditions of the past.

Purpose:

The purpose of Zeta Tau Alpha is the intensifying of friendship, the fostering of a spirit of love, the creating of such sentiments, the performing of such deeds, and the moulding of such opinions as will be conducive to the building up of a purer and nobler womanhood in the world.

I am a founding member of the Kappa Chi chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha started in 2005 at Shorter College. Therefore, I am very much invested in ensuring that the experiences Shorter offers does not undermine Zeta's mission. I believe that the current attitude of the administration at Shorter make many of the things in the Zeta Creed (listed above) difficult to accomplish.

"To realize that within our grasp, in Zeta Tau Alpha, lies the opportunity to learn those things that will ever enrich and ennoble our lives..." While ZTA may still provide those opportunities, Shorter's censorship and close-minded viewpoints limit the ability of ZTA to use its host school to fulfill that portion of the Creed.

"...to think in terms of all mankind and our service to the world..." Shorter's limitations on the lifestyles accepted in its faculty and staff prove that Shorter is not interested in the well-being of all mankind, but only the people who live like they do and believe like they do.

"...to seek understanding that we might gain true wisdom..." Shorter's administration has proven time and time again since the release of the controversial documents that they are not interested in understanding where its opponents come from.

“...striving ever to make our lives a symphony of high ideals, devotion to the Right, the Good, and the True, without a discordant note...” While Shorter’s administration may *think* they are devoted to the Right, the Good, and the True, they cannot begin to claim that there are no discordant notes, and refuse to accept that the Right, the Good, and the True might not be their point of view.

The Zeta Creed finishes by quoting the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13: “love, the greatest of all things.” I truly believe that the ladies who started the Kappa Chi chapter and the ladies who maintain its tradition love each other, and love those around them. Shorter's current administration, however, does not embody this love.

I love Shorter. I love Zeta Tau Alpha. I have always been proud to be a part of both of those rich traditions. I pray that Shorter comes to see the light and that Zeta is able to continue to be a part of Shorter, developing young ladies into a generation of purer and nobler womanhood.

Rachel West

- **Susan Nicely** is a Shorter graduate and opera singer and performs regularly on stages throughout the world.

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I met with Epting this morning...it was an hour and a half long and quite a meeting. To his credit, he heard me out even when things got a bit 'testy'. He kept calling me 'Miss Susan' even though I told him just Susan was fine.

I have very strong feelings about what is going on at Shorter and won't pretend to be OK with it and won't keep my indignation a secret for the sake of decorum. There are too many important things at stake here. I asked him if he was going to work with AGB, he said yes.

Then I cited the lack of faculty and alumni input regarding the policy changes. I cited the problems with the Lifestyle Pledge and he gave me the line about Shorter having the right to make it's own policy.

I talked about the economic bullying and intimidation and he gave the expected response basically saying those who object can leave. I then talked about how the department of music was being destroyed by these new policies and the extremely limited operatic repertoire that is now considered acceptable by Dowless. Then Dr. Wingard came to the meeting. I wasn't expecting him but I did not pull any punches in his presence and went on to talk about the impossibility of getting a degree in voice performance if the standard repertoire is forbidden. Dr. Wingard said that Elixir of Love wasn't explained fully to Dowless. I asked why a college president would forbid the study of material without knowing anything about it. He should at least ask his music faculty for more information before making sweeping "guidelines".

After Dr. Wingard left, I spoke more about how the music department is disintegrating with faculty and students leaving at alarming rates. Epting said the music department won't suffer because the faculty and students who are leaving will just be replaced by those "who want to be here". I stated, no faculty can possibly prepare a student for a career as a professional singer with this kind of censorship and no student could ever meet the minimum standards necessary under these conditions.

I asked him if it was Dowless' intention to do away with the performance degree programs at Shorter, he said no.

We went round and round about this for a while. He asked me why I was working against the school. I responded that I'm working to try and SAVE a school I dearly love and am working to protect

perspective students who, based on the stellar reputation of Shorter, might attend thinking they will be getting a first-class music education and under Dowless, they will not.

Then I went on to say what I consider unChrist-like is to fire two good people for no cause, who defended you and this administration and then give them only a two week severance. I asked him why he fired Jaime and Mark, he told me he couldn't tell me, but he had his reasons and he had the right as a new vice-president to bring in his 'own team'.

He then said the two week severance pay was not his call.

I then asked him to go to Dowless and communicate four things that I'd like him to seriously consider:

1) If he insists on continuing to require the (ridiculous) Lifestyle Pledge, at least grandfather in the current faculty and staff and require it only of new employees. It is grossly unfair to change the terms of employment for current employees, many of whom have devoted decades of service to Shorter and then threaten them with termination.

2) Allow alumni input into the selection of the next Director of Alumni Affairs. Epting responded that it would be HIS decision.

3) Allow an unbiased poll of alumni regarding the new policies and direction of Shorter. Epting responded that he didn't think anyone could do this poll without someone accusing them of bias.

4) Representatives from alumni who disagree with the new policies at Shorter be allowed one hour to present their position at the next Board of Trustees meeting. Epting responded, "you mean allow 50 people to yell and picket at the meeting?" I said of course not. It would be a respectful and calm presentation and I reassured him I wouldn't be the one doing the presenting to the Board. :)

Epting gave me his word that he would tell Dowless about these four requests. Then I thanked him for the meeting and rose and said good-bye. He stopped me and said, "Let's pray". I told him no, I prefer to pray privately. He said, "just one quick prayer". I again said no. He then said he would pray for me. I felt very strongly he was using prayer to have the last word and I was also not going to let him patronize me and sit there while he was being condescending, so I left.

Dr. Donald V. Dowless
President
Shorter University
315 Shorter Avenue
Rome, Georgia 30165

Mr. Joe Frank Harris, Jr.
Chair-Elect, Board of Trustees
Shorter University
P.O. Box 848
Cartersville, Georgia 30120

Dear President Dowless and Chair-Elect Harris:

Members of the faculty at Shorter University have consulted with the American Association of University Professors as a result of a series of four statements approved by the board of trustees at its meeting on October 21, without prior discussion with the faculty, including a "Personal Lifestyle Statement," a "Statement of Faith," a "Philosophy for Christian Education," and a document entitled "Biblical Principles on the Integration of Faith and Learning." They have expressed concern that the four documents are inconsistent with principles of academic freedom, with longstanding institutional practice, and with the terms and conditions of their appointments. The interest of the Association in this situation stems from our longstanding commitment to academic freedom and tenure, the basic tenets of which are set forth in the enclosed 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. That document, a joint formulation of the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities, has received the endorsement of more than 210 scholarly and educational associations. We note that the 2011 edition of the Shorter University Faculty Handbook, updated this past May, includes a section on "Academic Freedom" (2.8.1) that is based essentially on the corresponding provisions of the 1940 *Statement*.

Among the requirements of the above-mentioned documents, we understand, is that faculty members develop an annual written plan of how they are going to "integrate the Christian faith" into their teaching. The faith statement requires that faculty believe that the Bible is inerrant and infallible and that all non-Christians are condemned to "everlasting torment." All members of the faculty (and the staff), we note, are being required to sign these documents as a condition of continuing service at the university. Indeed, failure to adhere to the lifestyle statement "may result in disciplinary action ... up to and including immediate termination."

We wish to convey our concerns over the ramifications of these requirements for the exercise of academic freedom at Shorter University. Additional allegations we have received about adverse actions that the administration has already taken against faculty members viewed as out of conformity with the newly promulgated standards add to our concerns.

The information in our possession regarding the situation at Shorter University has come to us from faculty sources and media accounts, and we realize that you may have additional information that would contribute to our understanding of what has occurred. We would therefore welcome hearing from you.

Sincerely,

B. Robert Kreiser
Associate Secretary

American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

THE EVENTS of this fall at Shorter University are the culmination of a very long and ultimately successful attempt on the part of the Georgia Baptist Convention to change the nature of the college. When I came to Shorter as an English professor in the late 1980s, I was told by some of the older religion professors that I should be aware that I would not always be able to work there unless I was willing to become a Baptist and more particularly a fundamentalist Baptist.

At that time, the fundamentalist movement was taking the Southern Baptist Convention by storm and had not filtered down into the state conventions. But the political organization and the crash and burn philosophy of the organized fundamentalists within the convention promised to take state conventions and affiliated colleges.

The methodology was amazingly simple: Replace long-time board members with those loyal not to the college but to the fundamentalist cause; after the board is solidly in the fundamentalist camp, begin to change college policies. A liberal arts college would become a denominational function with no real independence from the state convention. In more common terms, it would become a Bible college.

Though modern fundamentalist shy away from the term “Bible college” and cling desperately to the term “liberal arts college,” anyone who understands the term “liberal arts” knows better. Shorter is a Bible college. It will never be anything else. It was a liberal arts college, but those days are behind it.

I WAS SO convinced of the outcome of this dire process, that I began looking for a new job as soon as I heard about the Georgia Supreme Court’s decision to give Shorter to the Georgia Baptist Convention. I was in the first wave of faculty and administrators to leave.

At that time, the GBC was very interested in escaping a shaky relationship with SACS because they had been accused of exerting undue influence on the board, a violation of one of the basic requirements for accreditation. So they were promising sweetness and light. “What was all the fuss about? We have no interest in changing the college. We just want to reform the religion department.”

They were so interested in demonstrating good will that they elected Harold Newman president. But the convention would eventually replace Newman with “their man.” Despite a valiant effort to protect the college and its faculty, Newman was shuttled out the door — with all the same old feigned sweetness and light — so that the final phase of the takeover would be complete. We witnessed that final phase this fall. The faith statement that my colleagues had predicted in the 1980s had come to pass.

FUNDAMENTALISM has very little to do with the broad history of Christianity and almost nothing to do with higher education. It is a movement born of fear and paranoia of the outside world, and it is by nature reactionary.

It first appeared around the time of World War I. The move of the United States onto the world stage, as well as Darwinism and other new ideas from the sciences and psychology had created an identity crisis for Christians. Some of them — including the well-known William Jennings Bryan — did not support America’s entry into the war. The aptly named revival minister “Billy Sunday” began calling people to take a stand. If you were for America, you had to be for Jesus. If you were not for America, you could not be for Jesus. The simple black and white categorization, as well as the creation of insiders and outsiders, is enormously compelling, especially in times of change, such as the present day. It allows the fundamentalist minister to rail against a flesh and blood enemy instead of deal with the more difficult parts of Christianity and life.

Unfortunately, fundamentalism is not terribly compatible with many of the central tenants of Christianity, as the situation at Shorter has demonstrated: humility and loving your neighbor despite his perceived flaws or his politics; the recognition that your own flaws might be bigger than his; the recognition that in the

context of God you know very little, almost nothing, and thus have no right to throw other people out the door for their beliefs, that in seeing the speck in your brother's eye you might miss the log in your own.

IT IS ALSO not compatible with a liberal arts education. Such an education demands that you face problems, even overwhelming problems, and that you look at them from multiple angles, that you try desperately to understand other people's points of view, even those with whom you passionately disagree, that you become conversant with other cultural and religious traditions, that you try to understand the greatest mystery of all — yourself. And that you live in the world, not behind a wall.

At the end of the day, a liberal arts education demands that you embrace freedom, the kind of freedom that the Bible demonstrates God gave to man: the freedom to make good and bad choices and to live with the consequences, but also the freedom to define yourself in a world that is scary and complex without having to spout a creed or declare yourself loyal to a minister or a denomination.

The simple dichotomies that fundamentalists create demand that you take a stand for the church or the doctrine or what they define as Christ, but upon analysis, they all rely on logical fallacies so obvious that anyone with a good liberal arts education can see through them.

For example, in last week's Rome News-Tribune, Albert Mohler argued that there are only two paths that a church-related college may take: that of Mercer or that of Shorter; benefits for same-sex partners or a faith statement condemning homosexuality.

REGARDLESS of the merits or faults of either choice, the dichotomy is false. He ignores many church-related liberal arts colleges that have made neither choice. More importantly, like a carnival huckster putting a rigged target before his audience, he denies his audience the right to think.

You either are or you aren't — there is nothing in between. In surrendering to this dichotomy, in choosing in such a context, you are giving up your ability to think — you are allowing Mohler and those like him to set the ground rules for your thinking. A man or woman who is created in the image of God deserves better. A good liberal arts education allows people to know better: to define themselves within the context of their understanding of God without a minister like Mohler setting the rules.

It is no accident that churches founded many of the great liberal arts colleges in this country and abroad — colleges like Shorter and Huntingdon College, my own alma mater. The biblical image of man was central to what became a liberal arts education: that man was created in God's image and was thereby capable of living and acting in the world in a multitude of ways — politics, science, mathematics, literature and the arts.

Implicit in this type of education was the freedom to think and act and debate, the freedom to view subjects such as art and music as important in themselves without relating them to the church. This did not mean that the church was left out of the educational arena, but rather that the conception of God was broad enough to include all of life without specifically tying every subject to the church.

THE MEDIEVAL education that this new renaissance approach to teaching and learning replaced was quite limited: all roads had to go back to the religious perspective demanded by the medieval clerics.

The famous caricature of these clerics arguing over how many angels could dance on the head of a pin reminds me of nothing so much as the petty, meaningless, denominational political squabbles, the cheap false dichotomies that have resulted in the loss of Shorter.

They have nothing to do with living in the world, with acting in the context of the freedom that God gave to each of us. And most of all, they have nothing to do with education.

I left Shorter College years ago, and though I experienced grief when I left, it is nothing compared to that of those who built the college as a church-related liberal arts institution. I grieve for them now. Some of them were standing on the road holding signs on Friday, Nov. 11 when the new president was inaugurated

in a closed ceremony.

I am very proud that the Rome News-Tribune and other news media noticed them. The Georgia Baptist Convention never has. The convention cared nothing for their contributions years ago when it began moving to take the college. It consulted not one of them. They were outside the fold: the unwashed, the outsiders, the uncared for, the enemy. But compared to the petty 5 percent (now 4.2 percent) of Shorter's budget that the Georgia Baptist Convention gives each year to support Shorter, these people gave much, much, much more in both money and time. Now they have nothing.

THE LATE Dr. Carolyn Ward was one of these. She had been educated at Shorter many, many years ago and spent her life working as a physician and supporting Shorter. A female doctor was not such a common occurrence back then.

She was a remarkable person and a remarkable example of what a Shorter liberal arts education could do: allow a person to imagine for herself a life that was unscripted and full of possibility, a life that others might have said could not be.

That, after all, is what the liberal arts are all about. She was a board member, a board chair, a devout Christian, a faithful Baptist, and a lifelong donor to Shorter. I have thought of her many times during the past few weeks.

The Georgia Baptist Convention cared nothing for her contribution to the college when it began its plan to take Shorter.

They steamrolled over her and others like her as if they were trash — she and the others like her were at most collateral damage in the wake of their political campaign. Though she was not with the protesters in body on Friday, Nov. 11, I am sure she was there in spirit as were many others.

At some point in the year after the Georgia Supreme Court decision came down, Dr. Ward said something about that decision that still sticks in my head: "I will never get over this," she said. "I will never be the same again." In some respects she spoke for all of us, for all of Rome.

Bill Rice of Rome was an English professor at Shorter from 1986 until 2006. He chaired general education from 1995 until 2001 and served as Dean of the School of Liberal Arts from 2001 until 2004. From 2004 until 2006, he was Interim Provost.

Read more: RN-T.com - GUEST COLUMN Liberal arts train you to think choose

Reverend Wendy Porter Cade:

I GRADUATED from Shorter College in 2001 with a degree in religious studies and am in a long line of some fine Shorter graduates.

It all started with Everett E. Porter Sr., chair of the chemistry department and dean of students in the 1920s. His wife, my great-grandmother, Hazel Myers Porter (Class of 1924), was a music major and went on to be a stalwart in the Rome community. She was followed by Helen Myers Long Cordell who graduated in 1946, and then my great-aunt, Jean Porter, a chemistry major and dancer, in 1949. My great-uncle, William Porter, was among the very first men to attend classes at Shorter College. Celeste Porter Godwin, Beth Royals Porter (Class of 1976), Phyllis Malone Porter (Class of 1995) and Andrew F. Porter (Class of 2004) are also in the league of Shorter Porters.

We have sunned in the front circle, run late to class, stood in line in the dining hall, performed in the theater. We have won awards of excellence in preaching, chemistry and music. We have slept in Bass Village, Van Hoose, Hazel, Alumni and Cooper halls. We have been published in The Chimes and The Periscope, and our faces have appeared on the pages of The Argo. We are Secret Sabotts, and we are crook-hiders. We are poets, athletes, scientists, artists, dancers, teachers, military and clergy. We have stretched Shorter tradition and spirit for nearly a century. Being connected to Shorter is in many ways a big part of what it means to be a Porter.

During my time at Shorter College, the biblical, Jesus-centered values of justice, freedom, liberation, equality, and peace became the foundation of my faith. I learned that being a Christian means serving a God who loves everyone without exception. I learned that Scripture is not a means to an end, but rather a means to understanding a God who works in ways completely beyond us and yet completely among us. My education has informed my faith deeply; I understand fully the connections between knowledge and holy.

I believe Shorter's "faith statements," released Oct. 25, stifle the learning process and encourage narrow thinking. The principles set forth in these statements widen the gulf between education and spirituality. I am afraid that my beloved alma mater has approached an unforgiving slippery slope where exclusion is valued over inclusion, where fear overcomes peace, where prejudice prevails over love, where the goal is uniformity over creativity. I see little room for the Spirit to work. I see little room for true academic scholarship. Instead of exuding God's paramount characteristics of joy, hospitality, inclusion, and grace, the statements enforced submit a set of values that are designed to shame and exclude.

I have been told by friends and colleagues to say goodbye. It seems that the present administration and the board of trustees are unmoved by the voices of countless students, alumni, and faculty. But I will not say goodbye for good. The Hill is my home. The sunken garden is named for my great-grandfather and tended by my family, and we will not let its care rest solely to the institution as it is now. My education lives on, too. No amount of discrimination and pain and weak theology can take it away from me.

Read more: RN-T.com - [LETTER TO THE EDITOR Family history makes changes at Shorter seem like goodbye](http://RN-T.com)

Dear Dr. Waters,

I write to you on behalf of a large cohort of Shorter College and Shorter University faculty, students, alumni, and friends who are deeply saddened by changes taking place at the school we know and love. We are deeply concerned about several issues that are threatening Shorter. We hope that as president of the Georgia Baptist Convention you may enlist the aid of the Education Commission of the Convention to reach out to Shorter to help an institution in crisis.

Our primary concern is with Dr. Don Dowless, Shorter's current president, who, as I'm sure you know, took office on June 1 2011. The primary function of a school administrator is to unite the various constituencies – faculty, staff, students, alumni, donors and trustees for the betterment of the institution. Dr. Dowless has failed in his primary mission on all but one level, and that is with the majority of trustees. Shorter University is losing many highly qualified faculty. To date, 38 faculty and staff have left or are leaving the university this academic year. Many of its brightest students are transferring to other schools. The best students in the state are turning away from Shorter as a school of choice. These alarming trends will mean the end of an institution that has enriched the life of Baptists and non-Baptists alike for over a century. We are seeking your help. **The loss of students, community support, and reputation for Shorter do not bring glory to Christ.**

All of this can change with the GBC's help.

Much of the distress, both on campus and within the Rome and greater Shorter communities began with the introduction of the high-profile Personal Lifestyle Statement that all faculty and staff are required to sign in order to be employed by the University ; a statement that carries with it a set of principles, taken in part from the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), though oddly excluding soul competency and the priesthood of ALL believers. Shorter's issues, however, run much deeper than possible disagreement on matters of faith or how best to ensure its practice. Shorter's issues are deeply entrenched in a tide of mismanagement—a tide that has become evident over the past few years, but has reached its apex under Dr. Dowless' leadership.

Furthermore, Dr. Dowless has failed to communicate meaningfully with Shorter alumni. In the fall he claimed he would no longer be reading letters from alumni. Shorter's proud tradition of excellence matters deeply to alumni, and Dr. Dowless has altogether dismissed alumni concerns as trivial—or even worse, as malevolent. One statement from his office reduced alumni's expressions of concern to perceived 'fear-mongering.'

On campus, Dr. Dowless has created an undercurrent of fear and intimidation. He has failed to establish or encourage meaningful dialog between administration and faculty. His approach has been heavy-handed and has created a very uncomfortable work environment on campus. Though he announced in the press that he welcomes open debate about issues, he has repeatedly demonstrated an unwillingness to engage in conversation with the faculty as a group. The Faculty Senate was dissolved under the previous administration, and without a formal voice, the faculty has no means for communicating effectively with their president. The majority of faculty and staff fear that expressing professional opinions and disagreeing with administrative policies and decisions may cost them their jobs. Some staff members have already been dismissed without warning or explanation. Loyal and popular alumni relations directors Mr. Jamie Clements and Mr. Mark Tunnell have already been fired without cause under Dr. Dowless's administration. When a faculty member scheduled an appointment with Dr. Dowless and revealed that the other faculty were too scared to approach him, Dr. Dowless gave a one-word reply: "Good."

Of paramount concern are threats to Shorter's curriculum under Dr. Dowless's administration, and these changes pose even greater threats to Shorter's accreditation by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Shorter's administration have placed themselves in violation of SACS principles by forcing changes to curriculum that run counter to best practices recommended by standards of academic disciplines. Such curricular mandates are being forced on faculty in the sciences, humanities, and fine arts. Classic works are being censored or cut entirely from the

curriculum—including works for the performing arts. Dr. Dowless censored a production of Donizetti's opera *The Elixir of Love* for its references to alcohol consumption, even though the work's ultimate (and forceful) message is about the utter folly of drunkenness. Dr. Dowless has threatened immediate cancellation of performances by students, faculty, and guest artists if certain guidelines are not maintained.

The hostile tone set by the current administration has already cost Shorter some of its most preeminent faculty. Many have taken new jobs at other academic institutions beginning next academic year. A short list of music faculty alone includes Dr. Matthew Hoch, Dr. Rebecca Salter, Dr. Chuck Chandler and Mr. Ben Harris. Also leaving is Dr. Martha Shaw, whose leadership of the Shorter Chorale and whose musicianship is acclaimed throughout the United States and internationally, was one of the linchpins at the heart of Shorter's internationally recognized music program. Other departments outside of the School of Fine and Performing Arts department are also being impacted. Mr. Richard Bristow, Mr. Chris Crawford, Mr. Ben Reigle Mr. David Nisbet and Miss Georgie Hall are leaving the Theatre department. Dr. Sandra Leslie, Dean of the School of Education is leaving.

The faculty are not Shorter's only loss. Students are leaving Shorter from many major departments. Students attending Shorter on substantial scholarships are departing.—A conservative estimate has more than two thirds of all music majors leaving Shorter at the end of the current semester and not returning in the fall. Other informal surveys have produced numbers closer to eighty percent. As you may know, Shorter has one of the finest music programs in the country—a shining jewel not just for Baptists, not just for Georgia, not just for Christians, but for the United States as a whole. The beauty this program produces is a tremendous tribute to God, and the loss of Shorter's critically acclaimed music program is more than a travesty. Such a loss will be inevitable given Dr. Dowless's negative leadership. Such a loss will be because of the choices of the Georgia Baptist Convention's Executive Board and the Shorter University Board of Trustees.

Shorter University donors have also been affected. Longtime supporters of Shorter have withdrawn their pledges to the university, Many have observed, both publicly and privately, that the essence of the university that they loved and supported has been fundamentally tarnished by the actions of Dr. Dowless. They know their school far better than does the current administration and they know that Shorter is and has always been a loving place of Christian values where students were nurtured to go forth into the world as part of the body of Christ. To suggest otherwise is to acknowledge ignorance of what a special place Shorter is.

At the heart of all these changes, sadly, are the explicit or implicit directives of the Georgia Baptist Convention, We must assume that the influence of the GBC's Education Commission directed these changes at Shorter—with mandates about the nomination and election of the Shorter University Board of Trustees, qualifications for selection of upper administration and general oversight of Shorter University. Consequently, the fate of Shorter now rests largely in the hands of the GBC alone.

The Georgia Baptist Convention can turn the tide of events at Shorter. We beg of you to do so, and to do so now, before it is too late. We pray that you will act with love in your heart, as Francis of Assisi prayed centuries ago:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

With love in Christ—to you, and to Shorter University,

Melissa King Rogers, PhD
Decatur, Georgia
BA English, Shorter College 1989

