



**New College**  
THE HONORS COLLEGE of Florida

*Gender Studies Program*

Thursday, August 17, 2023

Dear Mr. Corcoran,

I am writing to inform you that I'm resigning from my position as Assistant Professor of Gender Studies, effective today.

I have loved teaching at New College. I became a professor because I love reading, learning, talking about ideas, and seeing others' faces light up when they talk about something they're passionate about. I've taught a handful of individual students at other schools who shared my excitement about learning, but at New College, it's part of the culture. New College students are more creative, thoughtful, curious, hard-working, and inspiring than any other students I've taught. I'm so grateful to have had five years to cheer them on and see them progress from their first uncertain attempts to speak up in class to embracing their brilliance while completing theses. I'm grateful to the robust community of colleagues who have shared resources, experiential wisdom, and conversations about the scholarship of teaching and learning that have supported my continued growth as an educator.

But now Florida is the state where learning goes to die.

First, the claim that enslaved people—bought and sold as property, forced to work without pay, subjected to brutal violence, and separated from family among many other horrors—gained anything from slavery is a shameful lie.

Second, you and the new trustees regularly fail to offer evidence for your claims or demonstrate that you've done the reading. Students deserve leaders who are willing to read with an open mind, ask questions about things they don't understand, and offer evidence to support their claims, as I expect students to do in all of their work. The tenure "discussion" is one example. None of the trustees who voted against tenure said anything specific about any of the candidates. I wonder how many of them could even name one of the five people they voted against that day.

A more recent example is last week's vote to eliminate Gender Studies. Trustee Spalding claimed "Gender Studies does not grow out of the Humanities... It's interdisciplinary, but it's not the combination of existing actual disciplines like Political Economy... You read the website. I have no idea what it's about." What arrogance to conclude, on the basis of one paragraph on the internet, that a field of study should be eliminated because your limited conception of interdisciplinarity can't hold more than two fields together at once.

Because my research and teaching draw from history, sociology, literature, law, philosophy, political science, and psychology, I have to understand the conventions of each of those disciplines to be able to successfully weave them together to answer complex questions about gender and sexuality. All disciplines have their blind spots. Interdisciplinary scholars translate between them and fill the gaps. I've learned that what I call "interdisciplinarity," corporate recruiters call "cross-functional communication," an uncommon and valuable skill. I am very good at this, and I'm good at teaching it. It's a disservice to students that you've eliminated the interdisciplinary program that is best prepared to teach them this skill.

More importantly, though, eliminating Gender Studies is a reactionary attempt to prevent cultural shifts that scare you. Gender has changed before, and it is changing again. You can't keep your kids from being gay or trans. You can only make them hate you and themselves. Gender Studies offers the vocabulary, conceptual frameworks, and practice tolerating the discomfort of the unfamiliar that would help us all navigate change more gracefully. But that's why you canceled it.

Finally, you and multiple trustees are complicit in the state's attacks on trans people, making it impossible for me to live my life here. I transitioned 19 years ago, and all of my legal documents identify me as male. I have lived in red states all my life and have long tolerated many forms of homophobia and transphobia, but I can now be *jailed* for using the bathroom in my workplace. I'm banned from telling students the pronouns I've used (he/him) for the entirety of my adult life. I recently had to sign a disgusting ten page consent form that the Department of Health filled with outright lies so my doctor can continue prescribing testosterone, before learning that she, like so many other qualified medical professionals, is fleeing this state where medicine goes to die.

In March, *The Advocate* reported that Florida neo-Nazi groups are finding it much easier to recruit as a result of anti-drag hysteria. This year's legislative session also included bills that allow for unpermitted concealed carry and make it more difficult to track gun and ammunition sales. The Pulse massacre happened in Orlando, only a two hour drive from campus. The violent intent of this legislative agenda is crystal clear.

You and multiple trustees have ensured that New College will not be a refuge from this violence. Trustee Rufo has been a key figure in fomenting homophobia and transphobia nationally by repeatedly referring to LGBT people as "groomers," resurrecting a vile myth from the 1940's and 50's. Trustee Anderson has written books with hateful and melodramatic titles such as *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* and *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom*. You, Mr. Corcoran, have fired multiple prominent LGBTQ faculty and staff, ripped gender-neutral bathroom signage off the walls, and canceled the Pride Living-Learning Community, throwing away their books.

Furthermore, with no consultation with any relevant committees or individuals on campus, you unilaterally decided to turn beautiful student murals into bland beige walls and replace grass with astro turf in front of ACE, likely invalidating the building's LEED certification and supplying a steady stream of microplastics to pollute the bay. What a blight on this beautiful campus. I'll take color, creativity, and life over the beige walls and astro turf of a "citadel of normalcy" any day.

For these reasons and many more, I join 40 of my former colleagues in leaving. This exodus is an indictment of your and the trustees' actions as well as the state's regressive politics. I am reluctant to leave my colleagues and students behind, but you've already destroyed the New College I loved, and I won't work in an environment characterized by censorship, refusal of accountability, blatant disregard for students' wellbeing, and consistent denigration of both my work and my personhood.

Sincerely,

Nicholas L. Clarkson

Cc: Amy Reid, Director of Gender Studies  
Maribeth Clark, Chair of the Division of Humanities  
Brad Thiessen, Interim Provost