

High Level Threat Report

Beginning in March of 2012, members of the Towson University Debate Team began experiencing repeated verbal and physical violence enacted by their debate coach, Stephen Davis. Davis has fostered a team environment where the debaters are treated as expendable and forced to tolerate his abuses if they desire to remain on the team and retain their scholarships. Davis' immediate supervisor and wife, Dr. Jennifer Potter, fails to reprimand Davis despite multiple complaints from students.

Students Viewed As Expendable

At the 2012 National Debate Tournament, the team's two first-year debaters and a debater who is being recruited as a transfer student are in attendance, though not competing. While at the tournament, Davis becomes frustrated that the Towson debaters who are competing are not doing well and begins accusing the recruit of "hoeing around" in an effort to distract the debaters from the competition. On various occasions, in the hallways and competition rooms of the tournament, Davis accuses the recruit of being a lying, manipulative "bitch" who is a mole sent from an opposing team to make sure that Towson University does poorly at the Tournament. After the tournament, Davis informs the team that the student who was previously being recruited will never debate for Towson University.

Months later, a debater with a long standing on the team is informed through a Facebook message that he will no longer be traveling with the team in the same capacity after he and his partner have a less than favorable win record at a tournament. Davis explains to the remaining debater that the other student is not good enough to debate with her and no longer fits into a team that is becoming more competitively successful.

Instances of Abuse

Harvard

After the first day of competition at the 2012 Harvard Debate Tournament, a student becomes ill. Another student suggests that the team get dinner at a restaurant that serves soup and notes that there is a Panera Bread restaurant close to the school. Davis has heard that Jillian Marty, the former Director of Debate at Towson University, will also be eating at the Panera Bread and tells the debaters that he will not be going with them to dinner. Davis suggests that they all catch the shuttle back to the hotel and he drive to another restaurant. The debaters complain that it is very late, that they have to be up early the next morning to compete, and want to eat dinner and go to bed as soon as possible. Davis soon becomes frustrated when he learns that there is no shuttle and that the team will need to

catch a cab back to the hotel. Again the debaters suggest that the team eat at Panera Bread and catch a cab to the hotel after dinner. Davis becomes increasingly frustrated at the students' desire to eat at Panera Bread, asking why they would want to share company with Marty. He then tells the debaters that if they go they will have to go alone. The debaters decide to go to dinner without Davis. During this exchange the debater who suggested the team go to Panera Bread has also been complaining that her tub is becoming too heavy for her to hold. Lawrence Grandpre, a member of the coaching staff, offers to take her tub and is holding it when the debaters begin to leave for Panera Bread. Grandpre begins to walk with the debaters. Davis, now enraged, snatches the tub from Grandpre and throws it towards the debater. He then yells for her to come back and get her "fucking tub." She says that Grandpre has the tub and that it is fine. Davis says that the tub is not Grandpre's responsibility and again yells for her to get her "shit." Feeling unsafe due to Davis's aggression, the students continue to walk in the opposite direction of Davis.

After returning to the hotel, and still very upset, the debater calls Potter to tell her what has happened and that she feels unsafe. Potter, who has already spoken to Davis tells the debater that she must follow Davis' directions. When the debater returns home, her parents inform her that Potter has contacted them to tell them that her scholarship can be revoked if she continues to be insubordinate.

Wake Forest

Two debaters are preparing for a debate round when Davis becomes upset with one of the debaters, who is ill, because she does not have her "game face" on. The debater explains that she is not feeling well and asks Davis to calm down. Davis continues to yell. The student tells Davis if he continues to yell at her he will have to leave. Davis tells her that, until she is willing to take his coaching, he will be coaching the other members of the team. Davis throws her box of tissues and storms out of the room.

Inappropriate Sexual Comments

On March 20, 2013, Davis sends a Facebook message to a male student asking why a female student is trying to "cyber pop" her "kitty" (vagina) on the social networking site. He then refers to the female student as a "digiho."e."

No Oversight/Nepotism

Potter has demonstrated that she is unwilling to follow the appropriate procedures in addressing Davis' behavior. She has expressed to students that her major concerns are her career and her family, which includes Davis. The students' feelings of insecurity on the team are exacerbated as Potter acts as judge and advocate for her husband, despite University policy forbidding such actions. When complaints are presented to Potter she assures students that Davis means no harm, explains that Davis is merely joking, or asks

Davis to change his behavior. When students explain to Potter that these measures are not enough to ensure their safety, Potter expresses that she is unwilling to remove Davis from his position.

Attempt to Carry Out Threats

Students are warned that there will be punishments if they “continue to be disrespectful” and are told that despite their complaints, their methods of voicing their complaints are unacceptable. In a meeting where Potter yells at the students, one student is told that her competitive travel will be limited as a punishment for her “disrespectful” reaction to Potter’s behavior. Later, Potter schedules a meeting with Davis, a debater, and the debater’s parents. In this meeting the debater is asked if she feels unsafe on the team. When the debater says that she does feel unsafe, Potter explains that she is free to leave the team. The student is told that if she wants to remain on the team and retain her scholarship she must apologize to Davis for her complaints. At the end of the meeting, after the student’s apology, Davis assures the student that her scholarship will be safe, telling her that her scholarship will not be taken away unless he and Potter have it taken.

Future Recommendations

Given Davis’ inappropriate interactions with students, his propensity for violence, and Potter’s unwillingness to adhere to University policy or act with concern for the safety of her students, the Towson University debaters recommend that Stephen Davis and Jennifer Potter be removed from their positions as Director of Forensics and Head Debate Coach/ Director of Debate.