

University Puts 'Stomp on Jesus' Professor on Leave for Safety Concerns

Florida Atlantic University has put a professor who taught a controversial lesson last month on administrative leave.

The institution announced Friday that Deandre Poole, who had his students write Jesus' name on paper and stomp on it, was placed on leave for safety reasons.

"As a result of the reaction to a recent exercise in Dr. Poole's intercultural communications class, the instructor's personal safety has been compromised," the university said in a statement.

"Because of this, Dr. Poole will not teach any classes, conduct office hours, or be present at any of FAU's campuses or sites. Alternate instructors have been assigned to teach Dr. Poole's classes. Students have been notified and classes will continue as scheduled."

Charisma News and various outlets reported last month that Ryan Rotela had been suspended for refusing to participate in the assignment during an intercultural communications class.

Though the instructor was supposedly trying to teach the students "a lesson in debate," the FAU junior found the assignment to be offensive and insulting.

When Rotela went to Poole's supervisor after the incident, he was allegedly suspended. The university later issued a formal apology. It also said that "no students were forced to take part in the exercise" and "that no student has been expelled, suspended or disciplined by the University as a result of any activity that took place during this class."

Included in the textbook *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach, 5th Edition*, trampling on Jesus' name is actually an entire lesson.

"Have the students write the name JESUS in big letters on a piece of paper," a synopsis for the lesson reads. "Ask the students to stand up and put the paper on the floor in front of them with the name facing up. Ask the students to think about it for a moment. After a brief period of silence instruct them to step on the paper. Most will hesitate. Ask why they can't step on the paper. Discuss the importance of symbols in culture."

Poole said in an interview with *Inside Higher Ed* that he never wanted any student to "stomp on Jesus"; he was simply doing his job by following the course material. Though many commentators have suggested that Poole is anti-Christian, he said he has been connected to churches all of his life, "has served as a Sunday school teacher, and understands the power of the word 'Jesus' on a piece of paper because he cares deeply about Jesus," according to *Inside Higher Ed*.

"I am very religious," Poole said. "I see how the name 'Jesus' is symbolic. For people like myself, Jesus is my Lord and Savior. It's how I identify myself as a Christian."

The instructor noted that the idea behind the lesson isn't to make students step on Jesus' name but to discuss their feelings about doing so. He said no students were forced to do anything. According to Poole, the offended student briefly faced disciplinary action because of a confrontation the two had after the lesson—not because of the student's objection to the exercise.

The incident has caused Poole great stress. He said he has received hate mail and death threats.

"One of the threats said that I might find myself hanging from a tree," he said. "My safety has been in question. There are

churches that want to march against me. There are people calling on the university to fire me. And it's all for doing my job. I was doing my job."

Poole is a member of Lighthouse Worship Center Church of God in Christ, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where he belongs to the congregation's usher board. He is also part of the leadership of the Palm Beach County Democratic Party.