

Summary of Wu Research Lab Investigatory Meetings:

Date Conducted: February 1, 2016 to February 4, 2016

Investigatory Meeting Conducted By: David Noyce, Dept. Chair & Jason Jankoski, Asst. Dean

Students Interviewed Individually: Requested interviews with a random selection of half of the lab group. All invited agreed to the interview. Two additional students who were not invited requested an interview. Two former students also requested an interview after 'hearing' of the process. Names of those interviewed have been recorded but will not be distributed.

Purpose: Department received complaints from students regarding verbal abuse, missed meetings, threats to graduation, threats to eliminate funding commitments, threats to impact future references and career choices, and other actions that made them feel uncomfortable and unsure of their future. Meet with students to share voluntarily what is occurring in the Wu lab. Goal to collect first-hand accounts from students in the lab.

Possible Outcome: Information used to develop recommendations for next steps, if there is validity to the concerns brought forth.

Information presented: It has come to the Department and Dean's Office attention that there are significant concerns from a number of students regarding Professor Wu and his actions in the lab. We will take notes, but our report is intended to summarize statements that appear consistent with a majority of the students interviewed.

Format: Ask a series of pre-prepared questions. Students were informed that they did not need to answer any question(s) that made them feel uncomfortable. The focus was on getting their perspective of what is occurring in Professor Wu's lab.

QUESTIONS & RESPONSES:

1) Are you a M.S. or Ph.D. student? How many years have you been in Professor Chin Wu's lab?

We interviewed [REDACTED] students that were in the PhD program and [REDACTED] students who were in the MS program. Some of the PhD students [REDACTED]. Two of the students we spoke with [REDACTED]. On average most of the students indicated that it was taking much longer than anticipated to graduate from Dr. Wu's lab, 4-5 years for MS students and 7-9 years for PhD students.

2) When is your projected graduation date? Has that date ever been extended? If so, can you explain the reason for the extension from your perspective?

Students that depended on Professor Wu for funding generally provided responses that they either did not know or were unsure of their graduation date. These students indicated that their graduation date had been extended and/or that Professor Wu would not discuss with them a timeline for graduation. One student indicated they perceived were a number of built-in challenges to graduating. Conversely, students that were self-funded or had the ability to receive alternate funding appeared to have a clearer picture of their graduation date and were more likely to graduate in a timely fashion.

3) Have you had an overall positive experience in Professor Wu's lab?

This response was mixed, some students indicated a horrible experience filled with verbal abuse from Professor Wu. Others indicated the experience was not bad for them, but acknowledged that other students had a terrible experience. However, only one student interviewed described the atmosphere as positive.

Many students indicated the first semester was positive, this was followed by a change in behavior in the second and third semester. The majority of students indicated that the atmosphere in the lab contained fear, uneasiness, stress, crying, etc. One student indicated that the lab itself was a good place to work, except for Professor Wu. Another student indicated that they would not recommend other students join this lab, and if they had it do over again they would have pursued an alternative faculty advisor or degree. Some students indicated that they would actively try to dissuade prospective students from pursuing Professor Wu as an advisor when the opportunity presented itself.

4) Has Professor Wu ever:

Made you feel uncomfortable based on verbal exchange? Yes (7) No (2)

Used inappropriate language in your meetings/discussions? Yes (7) No (2) Example using the F-word.

Insulted your intelligence or suggested that you are not capable of successful graduate study (privately/publically)? Yes (7) No (2) Indicating they were stupid, lazy, and idiots. One student indicated that Professor Wu was unreasonable and demeaning with all of his graduate students.

Threatened to prevent you from graduating? Yes (5) No (4) Students indicating in the affirmative indicated that such threats were in one-on-one meetings.

Threatened to remove your funding or remove you from the graduate program? Yes (6) No (3) This was common for students who did not have ability to self-fund.

Threatened to prevent you from changing advisors or schools? Students who were struggling and approached Professor Wu with this were either threatened that no-one would take them or simply received no-response/indifference.

Threatened to provide only negative references? Yes (5) No (4) Professor Wu implied or actually threatened they would not get good references.

Threatened to “destroy your career” if you decide to leave the lab or make a career change? Professor Wu would generally avoid this conversation and make it very difficult to switch advisors when approached.

5) If yes to any of number 4, were there any witnesses to any negative exchanges with Professor Wu?

There were witnesses to Sunday lab meetings where some students were targeted and made to feel “stupid”. A couple of students indicated they witnessed Professor Wu lose his temper with other students in the lab. The common theme was that no one wished to fall out of favor and get yelled at so typical behavior is avoidance. It is important to note many of the exchanges describe by students were in one-on-one meetings. Students indicate seeing the after effects of negative exchanges in one-on-one meetings in witnessing students crying or leaving regular scheduled meetings in distress. Students appeared to try to support each other to “survive” in the lab. Only one student indicated that there were no negative activities occurring in the lab.

One student indicated that there appeared to be more negative exchanges with foreign nationals. While many of the foreign nationals interviewed had negative exchanges, the exchanges appeared to mirror the experiences with many domestic students. The distinguishing factor appeared to relate to whether the student had independent funding.

6) Has Professor Wu ever asked you to do something that made you feel uncomfortable?

One [REDACTED] student did indicate that the professor asked [REDACTED] to have a conversation with [REDACTED]. The student indicated they were uncomfortable with that and did not wish to follow the directive. Professor Wu pushed, but eventually backed down. Another student indicated they were required to [REDACTED]. A number of students indicated that Professor Wu would tell them that they were the worst student he ever had, and then conduct actions to make students compete against each other.

7) Has Professor Wu required you to do tasks that you feel are beyond reasonable expectations and different than tasks required by your lab peers?

The main item shared was writing grant proposals, getting no credit, and having their graduation date's extended to well beyond their peers in CEE. Any refusal to do what Professor Wu instructed was followed with a threat of not supporting their graduation. One student indicated that they had to [REDACTED], when other students only had to [REDACTED] to complete certain degree requirements.

8) Any additional information that you would like to provide that you think would be helpful?

Common responses were the desire to graduate in a timely fashion. The majority of the students would not recommend Professor Wu as a faculty advisor.

Additional information included that Professor Wu would not be available meet with them at their regularly scheduled times, then make them wait for hours and then reprimand them if they were not ready when he was available. Professor Wu did not appear respectful of the student's time.

There was also the perception from current students that a number of past students had left without completion of their degree or decided to transfer based on Professor Wu. One student [REDACTED] because he was making little progress towards his degree.

Professor Wu informed one student that he was aware that 50% to 70% of all of his students seek counseling to handle the stresses of his lab.

9) Is there anything further that the Department or College can offer you to help you succeed?

Wanted the department to help them graduate, develop a plan. Improve atmosphere in the lab.

10) Would you like College assistance in changing advisor and/or lab assignment?

Anticipate a couple of students will take the college and department on this offer.

KEY SUMMARY POINTS OF INVESTIGATION:

- All of the students who had Professor Wu in classroom described him as a different person in that setting than in the lab.
- The majority of students felt "sucked in" by Professor Wu's charm and nice behavior in the first semester in the lab.
- Once committed to the lab, during the second and third semester the behavior changed and they felt "trapped".
- Only one student interviewed did not indicate the desire at some point to consider leaving the program.

- Pattern of faculty member ignoring requests and only responding to items of perceived importance to him.
- Pattern of minimal respect for student's time.
- Behavior of faculty member perceived by most of the students as "manipulative and egotistical".
- Many of the patterns described mirror those of bullying.
- Overlying concern that faculty member had students learn on their own, but when incorrect conclusion may have been reached the focus was on negative reinforcement rather than instruction.
- All-students cooperated answering all questions.

Recommended Outcomes:

- Recommend anger management assistance for Professor Wu.
- Expectation from Professor Wu will conduct himself professionally within student meetings omitting his desire to call his students stupid, using derogative language, or other inappropriate words with his advisees in any capacity.
- Department will work with Professor Wu to clearly define a timeline for all of Professor Wu's students for graduation. Any change to the timeline would require the department's prior approval.
- Professor Wu needs to meet with students at their scheduled times or make reasonable attempts to reschedule the students at a mutually agreed upon time.
- Assist students to transfer to other faculty advisors if that is their desire.
- On-going monitoring of the lab to ensure a change in atmosphere and behavior by Professor Wu.
- Letter of expectation from the Dean and Department Chair.

Summary of Investigation

and Professor Chin Wu

Investigators

Professor Steven M. Cramer
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
College of Engineering

Professor David A. Noyce
Associate Department Chair
Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Ervin H. "Kipp" Cox
Director, Dean of Students Office
Assistant Dean of Students

Overview

This report provides a brief summary of the investigation pertaining to a series of e-mail messages sent by former Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) [REDACTED] made numerous allegations of CEE Professor Chin Wu. Specifically, [REDACTED] alleges that Professor Wu [REDACTED] verbally [REDACTED] abused him and other students in CEE, [REDACTED] Other allegations are included later in this document.

[REDACTED] He successfully completed a MS degree in [REDACTED], but did not complete a Ph.D. degree while he was here. Professor Wu was [REDACTED] academic advisor during his time at UW-Madison.

The following sections summarize the sequence of events, allegations of [REDACTED] actions taken by the College of Engineering and CEE Department, summary of findings, and conclusions and recommendations.

Sequence of Events

1. September 6, 2012. [REDACTED] sends an e-mail message to University, College of Engineering, CEE Department leaders, and former student colleagues, describing his position and requests. A copy is included in Appendix A.
2. September 9, 2012. [REDACTED] sends an e-mail message addressed to CEE Chair Craig Benson, and copied to other faculty and students. A copy is included in Appendix B.
3. September 10, 2012. [REDACTED] sends an e-mail response to an e-mail sent to him on the same day by Dean Steve Cramer. A copy is included in Appendix C.
4. September 27, 2012. [REDACTED] sends an e-mail message to Dean Cramer. A copy is included in Appendix D.
5. October 8, 2012. [REDACTED] sends an e-mail message to Dean Cramer. A copy is included in Appendix E.
6. November 6, 2012. A Skype video conference was held with [REDACTED]. Dean Cramer, Dean Cox, and Professor Noyce participated.
7. November 22, 2012. [REDACTED] sends an e-mail message to Dean Cramer. A copy is included in Appendix F.

Allegation Summary

_____ has made the following allegations in one or more of his e-mail messages:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. He collected data for a research project at _____, _____, including Professor Wu, _____. Although the _____ project was funded, he received no funding support for his efforts.
5. His Ph.D. preliminary exam was delayed several times, _____. When the document was reviewed by Professor Wu, "everything was wrong."
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. Professor Wu _____ used abusive language towards his students.
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____

Request

Through the series of e-mail messages, and a video conference with _____, he has requested an investigation of his allegations. It is _____ hope that the University will enforce disciplinary sanctions of Professor Wu as a result of his allegations.

Actions Taken by the College of Engineering and Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Dean Cramer and Professor Noyce met with and interviewed Professor Wu, and each member of _____ Ph.D. graduate committee. Interviews were also conducted with several CEE faculty members, and graduate students currently advised and supervised by Professor Wu. Dean Cox from the Dean of Students office was briefed throughout the process, and participated in the Skype video conference with _____.

Summary of Findings

[REDACTED] was considered to be a hard working student, but not a strong student by anyone's opinion. He had numerous academic limitations, including analytical skills and writing ability.

[REDACTED] was due to the numerous corrections required to improve [REDACTED]. Reviewers of [REDACTED] suggested that [REDACTED] and some difficulties connecting thoughts and precisely describing his completed and proposed research efforts.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Following up with [REDACTED] some months later, this member of his research committee was surprised to learn that [REDACTED] never completed the [REDACTED]. In fact, he opined that if [REDACTED] would have followed his advice, he would have successfully finished his degree. There was nobody who thought that the reason for [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Furthermore, members of Professor Wu's research team were available to help in the [REDACTED] process.

Professor Wu did not review his initial Ph.D. proposal prior to his preliminary exam in [REDACTED] hence, [REDACTED] graduate committee was surprised by the quality of the document and the defense was canceled hours before. Professor Wu was publically critical of [REDACTED]. Over time, members of his graduate committee remained supportive of his efforts, and helped him retool the document and research plan to optimize his probability of success. He was ultimately able to pass his preliminary exam in [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

In [REDACTED], it was evident that [REDACTED] would not finish his degree within his proposed time frame. His financial support was also ending. To the surprise of most, [REDACTED] abruptly left the [REDACTED] and returned [REDACTED].

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
There was no evidence that Professor Wu [REDACTED], nor was [REDACTED]. However, there is substantial evidence that Professor Wu was verbally critical of his students, perhaps verbally abusive, and uses language deemed unacceptable by most. Students and colleagues cited numerous examples of hearing Professor Wu using a very loud voice to criticize students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Everyone interviewed stated they were 'surprised' by the laundry list of allegations made by [REDACTED] in his series of e-mails. Nevertheless, each allegation was explored through the processes described in this document. The only allegation supported by the faculty and students interviewed is Professor Wu's tendency to verbally abuse graduate students in his program. It is recommended that Professor Wu meet with professionals in the Employee Assistance Office to discuss this problem.

APPENDIX A

 **September 6, 2012 E-mail**

APPENDIX B

[REDACTED] September 9, 2012 E-mail

APPENDIX C

[REDACTED] Response to Dean Cramer's September 10, 2012 E-mail

----- Original Message -----

Subject:Re: In response to your recent emails

Date:Mon, 10 Sep 2012 12:53:22 -0500

From [REDACTED]

To:Steve Cramer <cramer@engr.wisc.edu>

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

On Mon, Sep 10, 2012 at 10:13 AM, Steve Cramer <cramer@engr.wisc.edu> wrote:

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for sharing your concerns regarding your time at the UW with Prof. Wu as your adviser. As you know from Mr. Appell's email last week, I am looking into your complaint and have already begun to investigate the situation. I understand that you sent an additional email over the weekend that further elaborated on your original complaint (although apparently you had intended to copy me on the email). Please ensure you direct your emails on this matter to me. I believe we now have a good understanding of your concerns and complaint. I would request that you cease sending emails to the broader audience and direct them to me if you have new information to share. Please understand it will take some time for us to conduct our investigation. I will assume that you will continue to be reachable at this email address unless you advise me differently.

Sincerely,

Prof. Cramer

APPENDIX D

 **September 27, 2012 E-mail**

APPENDIX E

 **October 8, 2012 E-mail**

To: Steve Cramer <cramer@engr.wisc.edu>

Dear Prof. Cramer

On Fri, Oct 5, 2012 at 9:35 AM, Steve Cramer <cramer@engr.wisc.edu> wrote:

Dear

My investigation is actively proceeding but will take some time to complete. You should not be expecting regular updates. I also requested that you communicate with me only, on your concerns in this matter. Please honor this request in any future emails.

Would you be available for a brief in-person interview in October?

Sincerely,

Prof. Cramer

APPENDIX F

[REDACTED] November 22, 2012 E-mail