

**Testimony of Professor Paula Parks under Oath,
March 8, 2024**

Paula Parks' testimony alleges:

- *Before* the Oct 2022 EODAC meeting, Parks directed her students' attention to Dr. Garrett.
- Parks directed her students to attend the Oct 2022 meeting.
- Parks arranged for students to sit directly behind Garrett in the EODAC meeting.
- Parks testified that students felt threatened by a comment Garrett made during the EODAC meeting.
- *After* the Oct 2022 EODAC meeting, Parks used class time to have her students write complaints.
- Parks aided students in making public allegations based on those (baseless) complaints.
- Parks shared the allegations with local and national media

Note: The comment by Garrett described by Parks is included at the end of this document.

Before the Oct 2022 EODAC meeting, Parks directed her students' attention to Dr. Garrett.

Q. Okay. Prior to the EODAC meeting, what did you explain to your students was the purpose of the meeting? And what I mean by that isn't your purpose in being there. Did you explain to them what the meeting itself was about?

A. Yes.

Q. And what did you tell them the meeting was about?

A. That I was presenting to EODAC my proposal to form a Racial Climate Task Force.

Q. Was this EODAC meeting that was taking place irrespective of your presence to make your proposal? In other words, the meeting wasn't taking place because you had requested it. Am I right?

A. That is correct.

Q. This was a scheduled EODAC meeting. Am I right?

A. Correct.

Q. I guess at any time before the meeting did you explain to your students what an EODAC meeting is?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you explain to them that it involves a deliberative process where decisions are made by a group?

A. Not in those words.

Q. Or something to that effect. And what -- just so you understand what I'm driving at, I'm trying to get a sense as to what -- if you know, what their expectations were of this sort of meeting apart from your involvement in it.

A. I explained to them what EODAC -- I explained to them it was a committee meeting of faculty, staff and administration, and they were going to listen to my proposal.

Q. Did you ever -- did you have any kind of conversation with them that they might expect to hear debate on certain issues?

A. Discussion.

Q. Did you explain to them that they might hear questions or comments that they might find disagreeable or offensive or that they might not understand?

A. Not in those words.

Q. In similar words?

A. I told them there would be a discussion about my proposal.

Q. Did you indicate to them that there might be opposition to your proposal?

A. Yes.

Q. And that they might -- that they could expect to hear questions and comments that might disagree with your proposal?

A. Yes.

....

Q. Prior to the EODAC meeting, did you have any discussion with your students, whether at a porch meeting or elsewhere, specifically regarding Dr. Garrett?

A. Specifically as in focusing on him?

Q. No. Did you ever mention him to your students prior to the EODAC meeting?

A. Yes.

Q. In what context?

A. In the context of the Renegade Institute for Liberty.

Q. And what did you say about him to your students?

A. That he was the head of the Renegade Institute for Liberty.

Q. Why did you bring him up at all to your students prior to the EODAC meeting?

A. The Facebook posts.

Q. What did you tell your students about the Facebook posts prior to the EODAC meeting?

A. I showed them the Facebook posts.

Q. And why did you do that?

A. I like my students to know what's going on around campus and -- period.

Q. Were these -- the Facebook posts that you showed your students, did those specifically relate to the village space issue?

A. That was one that was posted, yes.

Q. Did you tell your students who were going to attend the EODAC meeting that they might expect to hear negative comments from Dr. Garrett?

A. No.

Q. Did you tell your students that they might expect to hear negative comments from other Renegade Institute faculty who might be at the meeting?

A. I don't know if I said for Renegade Institute members, or maybe just in general what they might expect to hear based on what I had heard at senate.

Q. Would it be fair to say that you warned your students that they might hear comments at the EODAC meeting that were negative toward either -- toward your proposal or village space issues or perhaps other issues that you felt were important?

A. Towards the Racial Climate Task Force.

Parks directed students to attend the Oct 2022 EODAC meeting

Q. And can you describe what happened when you got there at the meeting?

A. When I got there, I think all of the members were already seated. And I was told where to come in and where to sit, since I was presenting. And so I sat there. And I had been talking to my students about the Racial Climate Survey, the task force that I wanted to have, and telling them I wanted to do this to look more into how students were feeling.

And one thing that Tom DeWitt had told me was that he really liked to take students to meetings, and he thought that that was a really good thing. He said there were times he couldn't go to a meeting, and he would send a student in his place. He said other times he took students to meetings so they could just learn how the campus worked, how committees worked, so they would be more likely to be involved.

So I thought, "You know what? I've been telling them about this task force that I want, that I care about what they think. And so why don't I invite them to come and see what goes on in a committee meeting? Why don't they hear how I present something and what a committee meeting is like?" So I invited some of my students to attend the meeting as well.

Q. And how many students from your classes came to that meeting?

A. I think about seven or eight.

Parks arranged for students to sit directly behind Garrett in the EODAC meeting

Q. How soon after you arrived did your students arrive?

A. Maybe five minutes. Maybe 10. Not -- I don't think it was more than 10.

Q. And did they all arrive together, or did they sort of dribble in one at a time or two at a time or something like that?

A. They all came in together.

Q. And I think you testified that they were seated in a row behind Dr. Garrett; is that right?

A. Yes.

Q. So picturing the square that you showed us before and where you were seated, it sounds as though they were -- were there rows of seats behind you?

A. No. The window was behind me.

Q. Were there rows of seats behind Dr. Garrett's table?

A. One row.

Q. Other than that one row, were there any other seats behind Dr. Garrett's table?

A. One row with my students in it.

Q. Had that row been set aside for your students?

A. No. There were no chairs. There was nothing there when they walked in. I got up and there was a stack of chairs. I got up and took -- unstacked the chairs and the students helped, and we created a place for them to sit.

Q. Okay. Thank you.

Parks testified that students felt threatened by a comment Garrett made during EODAC

Q. Now, I think you testified earlier that the comment made by Dr. Garrett that your students reported to have found uncomfortable or unsafe was his comment -- his negative comment regarding the village space. Am I right?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you generally recall what he said about the village space?

A. What I previously testified to, that it was along the lines of -- and I could check the article, because it was in one of the articles -- does more harm than good or more negative than positive, or something along those lines, which I could look up and give you the exact wording.

Q. And, honestly, I wasn't working for the exact words. I wanted the gist of it. And I think you gave it to me. So was the village space supposed to be a, quote/unquote, "safe space" for your students?

A. Yes.

Q. Are -- the phrase "safe spaces" is -- strike that. Is it your understanding that the phrase "safe spaces" is something that's been heard more and more frequently in academia over the past 10, 15 years or so?

A. Possibly.

Q. And when people -- when you've heard the term "safe spaces," would you agree that they haven't only been used in connection with racial groups? For example, there are gender-based groups that have talked about safe spaces and other groups that might fall into protected classes that have also talked about safe spaces?

A. Well, the term "safe space" is not part of the Umoja practice. I'm just saying that they consider the village space a space of studying, a space of community, a space of conversations. And that in that space they feel safe.

Parks used class time to have her students write complaints.

Q. Okay. And so did you have a porch?

A. Yes. So a porch can be called -- a faculty could call a porch because they want to discuss something. A student can call a porch. A porch can be scheduled. So this was a student saying, "Can we have a porch?" And so I said yes. And so we spent at least an hour with them talking about the meeting.

Q. Now, does a porch interrupt the class time instruction?

A. Yes. So class -- the instruction of English 1A started an hour late, because they needed to talk, because they were so upset.

Q. Okay. And do you remember what the students told you during the porch about what they saw at the meeting or heard?

A. They said they didn't feel comfortable at the meeting. They said they didn't feel safe at the meeting. They said that the way people looked at them -- faculty -- the way -- all of those things made them feel uncomfortable and unsafe. And they said that it bothered them to see faculty behave that way, because faculty were people that they looked up to and admired.

....

Q. Did you then, aside from the porch, also have a discussion about what had happened at the EODAC meeting at village?

A. Yes, because some of the students didn't go to my class, and so there were students who were not part of that porch. And so in village the conversations continued. And other students were told. And so, yes, the conversation continued because they were so upset.

Q. All right. And were the comments and feelings and sentiments that were being shared at the porch similar to what was being shared at village, or was there a difference?

A. I would say they were the same kind of comments and feelings about how upset they were and what they saw and how the environment was racist.

Q. Did you give -- or did you entice the students who attended the EODAC meeting to attend with extra credit?

A. No. I did not give them extra credit to do anything related to any of this.

Q. Did you have your students write letters after this experience?

A. Yes. I wanted the students, as their minds were fresh -- and then, of course, being an English teacher, I'm going to think that it's going to be a good thing to write, so, yes, I asked them all to write something after the meeting. And some of those became letters or statements that they made to Academic Senate or letters that they submitted to the Board of Trustees.

Parks aided students to make public allegations

Q. And did you ask your students to speak at the Academic Senate meeting?

A. Yes. I asked them to -- I -- because that meeting -- and I'm not saying that it was the very next meeting, but it was a subsequent meeting. I asked them to share their experiences. Other things happened in that meeting after I had left that were the subject of discussion as well. So, yes, I wanted my students to share what they went through. I thought it was important that Academic Senate know what happened and the experiences of students.

Q. And I want to show you some exhibits; the first one is in District Exhibit 1. And the number is A81. And I will share my screen so you can see it, Dr. Parks, when I get to it.

Dr. Parks, can you see my screen?

A. Yes.

Q. And is this one of the letters that your students wrote?

A. Yes.

....

Q. Now I'm going to A85. And this letter actually goes from A85 to A86. Is this one of the letters that your students wrote?

A. Yes.

Q. And did your students submit these letters to the Academic Senate?

Page 1235

A. I'm not sure which went to Academic Senate and which went to the Board of Trustees. So they may not have both gone to both, but the date may tell us. So I'm not sure which letters went to which.

Q. Did you ask the students -- well, first of all, let me ask you how many students wrote letters like this, approximately?

A. Most of them.

Q. Meaning how many?

A. At least five, six.

Q. Did you ask any of the students who wrote these letters to come and testify at this hearing?

A. Yes.

Q. And how many of the students who wrote letters did you ask to come testify at this hearing?

A. Two.

Q. And what was their response?

A. The first one I asked said it was just too much. It was just too much. She had spoken at one of the -- one of those. And it took such a toll on her and she saw herself attacked in the media and the students weren't

expecting the kind of reception that they got. They were at the meeting; they were expecting kind of just what I said, "I'm going to a meeting; I'd like you to go too."

So what they experienced was shocking to them and it was upsetting to them. And so to experience it and then to process it, to write it down and maybe do something with it, like talking in public about it, was a lot to them.

So the Board of Trustees meeting was in December. And lot of them -- I checked in with them over break, and they were just -- they needed that time to just relax because of what they had gone through was soup setting. And so to ask them to relive it and talk publically again was more than they were capable of doing.

Q. And you mentioned the December 2022 board meeting. Did you speak at that meeting?

A. Yes.

Q. And what -- let me ask you, why did you speak at that meeting?

A. I thought the Board of Trustees should know what the Renegade Institute was doing that was impacting myself, the program, and especially my students.

Q. And did you ask your students to speak at that meeting?

A. Yes.

Q. And why did you do that?

A. Because I felt the Board of Trustees needed to hear from students. I felt they needed to hear student voices. They professed to care about students. The school is about students. We're not -- as faculty, we're not for ourselves; it's about students and that's what's important. And they needed to hear a student -- students' -- as many who would speak -- perspective.

Q. So you had one student who spoke at that meeting, right?

A. Yes.

Q. And she spoke in open session, right?

A. She spoke in the public comments, yes.

Q. So that will be one of the exhibits to this hearing. What is the name of that student?

A. Jordan.

Q. Okay. And she identifies it in the public comment, but there were several speakers, so I wanted to clarify which one was your student.

Parks shared the allegations to local and national media

Q. Okay. Prior to January 17th, 2023, had you given any interviews to the press regarding Dr. Garrett or the Renegade Institute or any of these issues?

A. Yes.

Q. Who did you give interviews with?

A. Two local TV stations. One -- and two print outlets.

Q. Do you recall which ones?

A. One was, I think, Inside Higher Ed. I don't remember the other print one. I could find it, but I'm discouraged from doing that. I'm sure it's right here next to me. The TV station one was KBAK. And I don't remember the letters of the other one. They were both Bakersfield stations.

Q. Was it KGET? Was that one of them?

A. Is that the one right across from the district?

Q. I have no idea.

A. If that's the one right across from the district office, then that was one of them.

Q. Did you reach out to these outlets, or did they reach out to you?

A. They reached out to me.

Q. Was Jose Gaspar one of the reporters who interviewed you?

A. Yes.

....

What did Garrett actually say during the EODAC meeting on Oct 11, 2022?

Excerpt of Oct 11, 2022 EODAC meeting transcripts:

GARRETT: Um, well, I'm concerned about repeated appeals to popularity as evidence of truth I know you [indicating to A. Thorson] teach that in your class that that's bad logic. Um, I'm also concerned about appeal to authority that I hear arguing that that's where truth is coming from. Um, what we do need to answer that question of if the questions and what the group that made them. That's a valid question. We should, and I remember, we heard this at some point: who developed this questionnaire? And I can't remember was the USC Equity organization or or, but, but, who organized the questions and do they have a biased interest? Because that is a valid question, and if it was a bias partisan group well that might explain some of the concerns now. Um, so I think that's a valid exploration also, um, because it was taken at a hot spot in a little strange window of time that's very unusual I do think it would be appropriate to do another survey to see if what sort of data we get because, um, Craig [Hayward] said this in his presentation, that it's really just a little shot of a glance a quick shot of what we saw, and so you know it's been another year or so I think it'd be a great time to do another survey people are back on campus. Let's see what students think now, what sort of environment they're in, so I'd love to see more data. Um, also, my concern about the survey is less about the data and more about the recommendations it makes. There is a huge gap between the data it observes and the recommendations it makes, and the data doesn't support a lot of those recommendations. For example, one of the recommendations was a safe space, I recall. Well, there's a lot of data that suggests that the safe space places actually create more con- comf- problems; more animosity; that some students are resentful if they exist. Some stu- there's there's a very good argument that that's going to take us in the opposite direction. So, I'd love to see evidence that connects the observed data with the actual solutions that are recommended because I see a huge gap between them. Um, and then another issue is we keep hearing that this this committee isn't large enough to meet the needs of this proposed task force. Well, the only reason the proposed task force is so large is because it's being proposed as so large. There's nothing written anywhere that says that the proposed task force needs to be this massive. Why couldn't the proposed task force be five six seven eight people out of EODAC who all represent different constituencies who do the work and that's what subcommittees usually work. Usually, a committee makes a subcommittee to move forward so to create some outside external thing seems a little bit odd and unusual um and it's really farming out a lot of work that we should be doing.