To search committee members and Provost Brent Carbajal,

You are receiving this letter because you have a crucial process ahead of you, that of considering a candidate for the position of Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education. This eventual choice by Provost Brent Carbajal will impact the wellbeing and success of students at Western for years to come, and for this reason we believe it is important for you to receive feedback from students themselves who have concerns to share regarding any candidates.

We are a group of five alumnae and students from the Journalism Department who ended the spring of 2019 extremely disheartened by our faculty’s lack of action and response to an inappropriate, unprofessional and reactive email shaming an emerging student in the program, sent by Dr. Webb to faculty both inside and outside of the department.

The gravity and impact of this situation and further reactions by Dr. Webb violated multiple sections of the [Code of Faculty Ethics](https://www.wwu.edu/facultysenate/A_Fac%20Hndbk%2009%202011/APPENDICES/App5_2019.pdf), which are listed below. We believe it is important to inform you of these violations, as they do not exhibit respect or care for students.

1. **Obligations to respect the dignity of others (Code of Faculty Ethics - Preface)**

After the Western Front published a story by Kayla Sousa regarding the Academic Coordinating Commission rescinding a motion to ban the N-word from classrooms, ACC Chair Dr. Webb sent an email criticizing Kayla, identifying her by name, calling the article a disgrace to the department and stating her lack of faith in Kayla as a journalism student. The Western Front is a class required to complete the journalism major, which Kayla had not yet been accepted to, and it was her first time writing for the Front.

The article was reviewed by a lawyer at the Student Press Law Center, and they confirmed it did not slander Dr. Webb, was not libelous, and did not outline the ACC’s actions inaccurately. The issue with the story was that it did not contain a response from  Dr. Webb, after she told Kayla that she did not have time for an interview before the story was to be published.

Dr. Webb did not reach out to the Western Front’s editors or Kayla herself with concerns about the article before sending the email. However, Dr. Webb forwarded the email to Western Front editor-in-chief Stella Harvey after it was sent, when she reached out to apologize to Dr. Webb.

Dr. Webb did not follow the direction of her Department Chair, Jennifer Keller, who specifically told Dr. Webb not to send the email to the department until after she reviewed it. Out of personal frustration, Dr. Webb’s email was sent to 15 faculty members of the journalism department, Seattle Times Reporter Ron Judd, and McNeel Jantzen, previous Faculty Senate President and Kayla Sousa’s professor at the time.

For context, a reporter like Kayla would work with an editor like Esther to pursue and write a story, and then it is the final decision of the editor-in-chief and managing editor to publish the story.

As a professor in the Journalism department, Dr. Webb should know the flow of how stories are published, meaning she knows that any concern or criticism should be brought to the Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor, who are responsible for what is published. In her email, Dr. Webb blamed Kayla as an individual for the publication of that story, rather than the Western Front staff as a whole.

We believe Dr. Webb failed to respect Kayla’s dignity by publicly shaming her– by name– to professors who she could potentially work with in the future.

We have attached a copy of this email.

1. **As teachers, the Western faculty encourage the free pursuit of learning by students, and demonstrate by example the best scholarly standards of their respective disciplines. The faculty respect students as individuals and adhere to their designated role as intellectual guides and counselors (Code of Faculty Ethics, Section 2).**

As attempts were made to add necessary context and information by organizing an interview with Dr. Webb, Kayla and her editor Esther Chong, both of whom are students of color, were cut out of the process by Dr. Webb and other faculty. Dr Webb stated that she would not agree to a necessary follow-up interview if either Kayla or Esther were in the room, and only agreed to meet with Stella, the editor-in-chief, or Laura, the managing editor, both of whom are white.

This story and any necessary correction was well within the purview and capability of Esther and Kayla with the permission of the top editors, but they were denied the opportunity to learn from this situation despite being blamed for it.

Intervention was required by another faculty member to convince Dr. Webb to allow Kayla and Esther to participate in the interview, with the decided conditions being that Kayla and Esther would only be present for part of the meeting, and they would not be allowed to ask questions or add comments.

Dr. Webb’s strong objections to the participation of two journalism students of color on the assignment, and her clear discomfort with their presence, impeded their ability to complete an article they originally worked on and restricted their free pursuit of learning. Through this process, they felt as if they were discriminated against.

Dr. Webb failed to demonstrate by example the best scholarly standards of journalism by coordinating the direction of the story and the interview via email with journalism professor, colleague, and friend, Betsy O’Donovan, current Western Front faculty advisor, rather than with student editors who worked on the story.

1. **The confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student is respected, and any exploitation of students for private advantage is avoided by the faculty member who acknowledges significant assistance from them. (Code of Faculty Ethics - Section 2)**

In the meeting, Dr. Webb intimidated student and then-editor-in-chief of the Western Front, Stella Harvey, in her position as Stella’s former professor. During the meeting, Dr. Webb exploited one of Stella’s assignments from a class from Winter 2018, by presenting it a year later in the meeting as an example of how Stella had ended up disappointing her by running the story. Dr. Webb also brought up how she had selected Stella’s work for Scholar’s Week 2018. Stella felt that this was done in order to intentionally intimidate her during the meeting, as it set a dynamic of power that advantaged Dr. Webb in this situation. This action also exhibited a failure by Dr. Webb to respect the dignity of Stella as a former student.

**FURTHER BACKGROUND**

After editors released an updated article based on that interview, Kayla and Esther expressed feelings of deep discomfort and fear in the department as a result of the situation to other faculty. Several faculty members met these concerns with defenses of their colleague, Dr. Webb.

We organized a meeting with faculty to address the situation, where they heard emotional and vulnerable testimonies from Kayla and Esther about how Dr. Webb’s actions impacted their mental health, academic performance, and desire to continue in the program. **Attached is a detailed report completed by a third-party moderator summing up the journalism faculty-wide meeting on June 7.**

Dr. Webb stated that she **did not regret** her decisions, both to criticize Kayla by name in a widespread email or to exclude Kayla and Esther from the due process of correcting the story. She **refused** to apologize.

Dr. Webb also exited the meeting early without warning and several attendees saw her roll her eyes, showing disrespect for the dignity of students who took the time to share their personal, emotional and harrowing experiences.

Dr. Webb did not respond to a polite and professional email sent by Esther after the faculty meeting sharing how this exit and her conduct were hurtful.

While Dr. Webb acknowledged the challenges of having to deal with the situation as both a journalism professor and ACC chair, her actions were self-serving, did not exhibit consideration for students’ dignity or wellbeing, and showed a lack of understanding of the gravity of the power dynamic in the situation.

This power dynamic is not uncommon at Western: a tenured, white, high-credentialed faculty member used their position of power to deeply and negatively affect the experience of a student of color, in this case by sending an email to other faculty members criticizing the student.

We hope you will consider the contents of this letter and the supporting documents seriously as you critically analyze the impact these candidates could have on the student experience at Western. We felt we would be remiss not to share these concerns regarding how greatly our own experiences were shaped by Dr. Webb when she held a position of even less power and influence.

Thank you for your consideration,

Julia Berkman, Esther Chong, Stella Harvey, Laura Place and Kayla Sousa