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Subject: Dean Gerald Koocher and the APA

Dear Colleagues,

Recently, some among our community have participated in a national debate about the American Psychological Association (APA) and the deliberations it undertook a decade ago on the advisory role of psychologists in securing information from captured enemy combatants by military personnel. Here at DePaul, the attention has focused on the role in those deliberations of one of our own.

I am among those who believe that the George W. Bush administration's use of torture was ineffective, illegal under international law, and morally inexcusable. It is ironic then, perhaps, that I do not share the position of some that Dr. Gerald Koocher, dean of the College of Science and Health, should be sanctioned by DePaul University for his work with the APA. Permit me to explain why.

During the 2005-2007 period in which those APA deliberations took place, Dr. Koocher served the organization on the board of directors for one-year terms as president-elect, president, and past-president. The APA was under pressure to define appropriate roles for psychologists working in national security settings, as were other professional organizations, including the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association. The APA appointed a task force to help its members working in such settings interpret the APA ethics code in these contexts. Dr. Koocher served as one of the liaisons to this task force from the APA leadership. The so-called PENS (Psychological Ethics in National Security) task force—and ultimately the APA ethics committee and full board of directors—determined that there were important, but highly limited, roles that psychologists could fill ethically in advising government and military officials.

Unfortunately, senior staff employed at the APA concealed important information from the task force and the trustees, including conflicts of interest, delayed ethics investigations, and collusion of the senior staff with the military and intelligence agency personnel in charge of interrogation programs. Much of this only came to light when the Hoffman Report, commissioned by the APA, was released in July 2015. That report identified senior APA employees who participated in the cover up, several of whom have since announced their retirement, resigned, or been terminated by the APA.

When it came to the APA board, however, the Hoffman report concludes: "We did not find evidence to support the conclusion that APA officials actually knew about the existence of an interrogation program using enhanced interrogation techniques." (p. 23). The report also found no evidence that security agencies influenced the PENS report (p. 24). What the report does seem to show is a misplaced trust in the staff on Dr. Koocher's part, and an overly aggressive

defense of them through the discrediting of those who criticized them at the time. Certainly it is a failure of effective governance on the part of the board. Even here, though, culpability rests on what the board knew at the time, and the record is clear that key information was withheld from the board by the APA staff.

Dr. Koocher has thought at length about his work with the APA (<http://www.ethicsresearch.com/>). His regrets for having too quickly defended the senior APA employees are clear and, in my conversations with him, genuine. The APA itself continues to demonstrate great respect for our colleague, where he serves as treasurer of one division, received a mentoring award at the APA's annual convention this past August, and confirming his election on the APA's governing Council of Representatives beginning in January 2016.

There is tragedy and irony that Dr. Koocher must bear accusations against his ethics when he has spent his professional life writing on and contributing to the ethics of his profession. His public statements and writings over more than three decades have consistently argued against all forms of torture, and those convictions contributed to his appointment as liaison to the committee studying the issue in the first place.

Moral evaluations of matters that transpired a decade ago are challenging and must be shaped by data and thoughtful consideration of all available evidence. I respect those in our university community who are concerned that Dr. Koocher's actions, as well as perceptions and interpretations of those actions, may be inconsistent with our ideals of compassion and human rights, but I simply do not find that the evidence supports the judgments that some have rendered. Nor can I find a path to honor the requests that DePaul assemble a body to conduct its own independent hearing and investigation of the matter. We do not have the authority to call witnesses or command evidence outside the university community, and therefore would be forced to rely on information we already have. The Hoffman report itself, the result of over six months of intensive investigation, noted that given the length of time that has passed and the lack of authority to subpoena witnesses and the inability to access classified information, any investigation has inherent limitations. Its conclusions had the consequences for the APA staff that we have seen. It also determined that Koocher did not have direct knowledge. I see no reason to think that yet another investigation by us would come to a different conclusion.

During the course of our campus conversations, some raised criticisms of the dean's leadership style and decisions here at DePaul. Others came to his defense, speaking highly of his leadership. All of this feedback has been collected by the provost and will be communicated to Dr. Koocher, carefully anonymized. In addition, the provost has informed me that his former institution used a more formative evaluation process for deans and program directors which he will introduce here at DePaul this year. As always, disagreements with decanal decisions may continue to be addressed in our existing ways: raised informally with the dean himself or in the various meetings of the college, brought directly to the provost's attention, or expressed during the review process for a dean's reappointment.

St. Vincent de Paul fought long and hard against the inhumane treatment of prisoners in the French galleys and he surely would side with those who oppose torture in any context. He also famously came to the defense of his great intellectual enemy, the Abbe de Saint-Cyran, in 1639, who was imprisoned and being investigated for theological opinions St. Vincent opposed. St. Vincent similarly came to the defense of two bishops who had approved books by Jansen and Arnauld. He thought those books had spread intellectual mistakes with terrible results for humanity and spent a considerable part of his life countering those ideas. And yet his heart went out in mercy to the bishops when they were to be sanctioned for those acts, so he took their side. These are not exact analogies, of course, but they are instructive nonetheless, showing a heart that could condemn ideas and show mercy at the same time. I trust that St. Vincent's merciful heart similarly figures into the ways that we consider such things at DePaul.

I am grateful the DePaul community has a heart that so immediately rises to the needs of those who are so inhumanely treated in our own time. I am grateful, too, for a university community that accepted Dr. Koocher's invitations to meet and discuss these issues at great length. I benefited greatly from the university's evolving discussion over these weeks as my own thinking took shape.

And so, I hope that you'll understand my own conclusions and decision that no further action will be taken in this matter. While I am certain we will continue to mull these matters over, I know we'll do so with all the wisdom and humility that judgments of the human heart deserve.

With great respect,

Rev. Dennis H. Holtschneider, C.M.  
President