

An Open Letter to the Administration of Mount St. Mary's University: A Declaration of Grievances

My name is Clayton R. Votta, and I am in the class of 2023 at Mount St. Mary's University. I am from a rural area outside of Towson, MD known as Hydes. I first heard of the Mount through my local parish and through my grandmother. She used to organize my parish's annual pilgrimages to the grotto that is located on campus. I am both a first-generation college student and a legacy student. That may confuse some, so let me explain. I am the first member of my family for more than three generations to attend college; however, my distant ancestors attended Mount St. Mary's University. I am double majoring in Secondary Education with Social Studies and History. My goal is to attend graduate school in order to become a college professor. I am very fond of this school and enjoyed being a Mount Ambassador for the Admissions Department. During my time as a Mount Ambassador, I preached about how the community at the Mount was inclusive, friendly, and welcoming. I was able to convince all of my perspective students to apply to the university and was able to get two students to actually attend. I truly do love this school. One day, I'd love to return as a professor in order to help foster the same kind of environment which made me fall in love with the Mount. With all that being said, I have grievances that must be properly addressed by the administration of Mount St. Mary's University. I write this out of my love for the Mount.

What does it mean to be an educator at Mount St. Mary's University? This question is answered by the Undergraduate Mission Statement, created by Mount St. Mary's University itself. As you know, mission statements are texts that display goals a university has when educating students. An educator at the Mount must encourage and create an environment that allows their students to complete the mission statement. Mount St. Mary's mission statement proclaims that the school is "dedicated to liberal learning in the pursuit of truth" ("Academic"). It states that the Mount "enable[s] individuals to understand and to challenge or embrace the cultural forces operating on them" and "encourages each student to undertake free and rigorous inquiry" ("Academic"). The university wishes to have students "live by high intellectual and moral standards...respect the dignity of other persons...see and seek to resolve the problems facing humanity... [and] commit themselves to live as responsible citizens" ("Academic"). Dr.

Joshua Hochschild has demonstrated in his actions and his publications that he no longer fosters an environment that helps lead students to achieve the Undergraduate Mission Statement.

Dr. Hochschild no longer strides to create an environment where students can “live by high intellectual and moral standards” (“Academic”). His “semi-autobiographical story” includes many pieces of misinformation, half-truths, and just flat out lies (Hochschild). When looking at a representative, you look at their character as a human being. A person’s character is a combination of their lifestyle, actions, and beliefs. However, Dr. Hochschild believes that “it’s what [they] do in office, not [their] style or tweets, that matter” (Hochschild). This line of thinking leaves out many factors that make up a person’s morals and beliefs. When addressing the 2016 election, Dr. Hochschild claims that there was no outside influence (Hochschild). The professor never stated where he obtained this information, but it can be inferred that it was the original release of the Muller Report. This is very convenient for Dr. Hochschild’s argument due to the fact that the un-redact version of the Muller Report, that was obtained from BuzzFeed’s FIOA request, shows that there was outside influence. The professor then transitions to talk about the “controversial rule changes allegedly intended to accommodate a national health scare” (Hochschild). These rule changes were extending early voting periods and expanding mail-in ballots among other changes in order to ease the nation during a global pandemic. These changes that he refers to were challenged by the courts. Additionally, the courts upheld them. For many of the states, all three branches of government agreed on these changes. We are not just in a national health scare as Dr. Hochschild would like his audience and students to believe. We are in a global pandemic, one that the world has not seen the likes of since the 1918 Spanish Flu. As of writing this letter, there are 508,949 Americans that have lost their lives due to this global pandemic. To put that into context, that is more casualties than any American war, excluding the

inclusion of Confederate casualties during the Civil War (United States). The professor then moves on to talk about how mail-in ballots are “known for increasing the chances for fraud” (Hochschild). Once again, he states a blatant lie. The United States can trace the origin of mail-in ballots all the way back to the Civil War and we have used them ever since (Rotondi).

Additionally, the Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency released a publication to explain how mail-in ballots were safe (*Mail-In*). Dr. Hochschild then shifts to talking about Trump’s election lawsuits, where he makes the absurd claim, “The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence” (Hochschild). In other words, he claims that just because they can’t find any evidence, does not mean there is no evidence. The foundation of all facts is grounded in evidence. Evidence makes up the very nature of science. A lawyer cannot build a case on the very fact that there is no evidence. However, that is exactly what the Trump Campaign team did and Hochschild is able to not only conveniently ignore vital information but also contradict his previous statement. The professor bluntly states, “Did [the judges] even look at the evidence? Rarely” (Hochschild). He stated that there was no evidence but then criticizes the judges for not looking at the evidence. The judges, many of whom were Trump-appointees, are deemed bias against Trump in the eyes of Dr. Hochschild. This is not the last time that the professor brings up evidence in his article. He brings it up when talking about credibility. He argues that “rightly-credentialed evidence” and “properly authorized sources” do not matter (Hochschild). This is coming from a professor with a doctorate. He claims that sources and evidence do not matter when making an argument. This is an outrageous statement for an educator to make. I am ashamed to have an educator that holds this belief teaching at the Mount. The professor then proceeds to talk about the January 6th “civil rights protest” (Hochschild). During the length of his discussion, he downplays the events more than ten separate times. This alone is outrageous and

unprofessional. These claims alone should require the Mount to take action. History will remember the events in D.C on January 6th as a domestic terrorist attack, where the lives of our elected officials were threatened. And yet Dr. Hochschild downplays it, time and time again.

Dr. Hochschild's actions and publications show that he no longer seeks to foster an environment where students can "respect the dignity of other persons" ("Academic"). Dr. Hochschild showed several times his disrespect for others. When addressing the Charlottesville protest, he states it was just a "debate about statues" (Hochschild). If it was just a debate about statues, then why were twenty people hit by a fast-moving truck. One death, nineteen injured and Dr. Hochschild believes it was just about statues. The protest were about far more than just statues. It's what the statues represent. In AMER 202, we discuss this very idea regarding Native Americans and Mount Rushmore. It is about the oppression, discrimination, and atrocities of the past that the statues represent. Yet, Dr. Hochschild is ignorant of this fact. Dr. Hochschild also states that he hoped Trump "could outperform the margin of fraud" (Hochschild). The undertone and implication of this statement implies that only democrats would commit voter fraud. He is implying that only one party would ever take illegal means to win votes. The most well-known case of fraud in a United States' presidential election was Watergate. A scandal that was headed by President Nixon, a republican. Dr. Hochschild additionally defends the crowd of the January 6th rally and riot in D.C. He argues that the people that broke the law are "hardly representative of the kinds of people who were [at D.C.]" (Hochschild). The professor attended these events with Neo-Nazis, white-supremacists, people who wore and promoted hate-symbols, and self-proclaimed militia members of the extreme right. According to the professor, this is a very respectable group of people. A group of people who pride themselves on hatred and suppressing others.

Dr. Hochschild has shown that he no longer strives to foster an environment where students can “commit themselves to live as responsible citizens” (“Academic”). Throughout this letter, countless examples of Dr. Hochschild’s lies, half-truths, and misinformation has been shown. He has repeatedly diverted the truth with his words. But they’re just words, right? Dr. Hochschild himself believes that “words matter” (@JoshHochschild “Words”). Words matter because they hold glimpses into the beliefs that an individual hold. Dr. Hochschild has shown through his words that he no longer cares for the truth. He additionally has shown that he has a lack of respect for others through the very same words. A responsible citizen would be respectful of others and seek the truth. A respectful citizen would also not claim to have broken the law. Dr. Hochschild claims to have been “close enough to the front of the very large crowd at the capitol” (Hochschild). In the timeline of events, the crowd would have already passed the first police barricade. This would put Dr. Hochschild within the restricted area around the Capitol. In other words, the professor was trespassing on federal grounds and that is a crime. Hochschild claims that the article is a “semi-autobiographical story,” so the events depicted are the events that the professor took part in (@JoshHochschild “new followers”). Additionally, Dr. Hochschild confirms that he is “privileged”, and he confirms that he factors in his privilege when making decisions (@JoshHochschild “privilege”). Finally, a responsible citizen would wish to uphold the rule of law and hold people accountable for their actions. However, Dr. Hochschild thinks otherwise. The professor calls the impeachment trial a “show trial” and asks the question, “Whose idea of unifying is this?” (Hochschild). The results of the Senate impeachment trial showed that there was more bipartisan support against the president than any other Senate Presidential Trial in all American history. How can it be a political show trial when it had so

much bipartisan support? Additionally, the point of the trial was to show that every American must face the consequences of their actions.

Mount St. Mary's has shown in their actions that it has a more reactive nature than proactive. I find this troubling. A university that preaches about living a life of significance should have a more proactive nature. They should look at the cause of problems and work on fixing the situations before they arise. The school is always advertising and preaching its commitment to diversity and equity. However, they are repeatedly more reactive than proactive on issues involving diversity and equity. The student body still remembers the botched effort when handling the Pangborn 2nd Floor Restroom Incident, the n-word spray-painted across the mirrors, though a year has passed, the school has appeared to have given up on finding the culprit. And so, a hate crime which occurred on our own campus goes un-punished and the racist who committed it still walks among us. The student body still remembers this, and we still do not forgive the administration for the incompetence that occurred. It seems that the school used the very student who reported the hate-crime as the scapegoat. Countless students and even Resident Assistances vouched for the integrity of the student, but the Mount went forward with the expulsion. The student was expelled; however, the student was later reinstated into the university. The school did not inform the student body of the change until the very end of the semester (Trainor "Pangborn"). All the Mount has done since as far, as the student body is aware, is some departmental changes to Public Safety. This was needed but more should have been done to help heal the Mount community.

And here we are again, the school showing an inability to properly act. An educator has clearly demonstrated their inability to create an environment for students to achieve the Undergraduate Mission Statement, the Mount community is divided, and students are hurt

(@MSM_LiberalArt). This is not about politics. It is about the Mount's inability to practice what they so proudly preach. If you still believe that this is about politics then let me remind you about Chris P, Class of 2021. He expressed his political views on Instagram. The gist of what he stated was F*** BLM and F*** Antifa. As far as the student body is aware, he was banned from in-person classes and banned from the campus itself. There is hypocrisy in the school's actions so far. They state that they will not take action because students and staff have the right to express their views (@mountstmarysu; Trainor "Weekly"). And yet, a student is punished, and a professor is not? Why does the Mount hold a higher standard of their students than their professors?

The administration of Mount St. Mary's University must take action. The administration needs to become more proactive. The administration needs to be equitable with its policies. The administration must ensure that all students are provided with an environment that fosters the beliefs of the Undergraduate Mission Statement. By addressing the actions of Dr. Hochschild, I am calling for the Mount to take disciplinary actions. The Mount should revoke Dr. Hochschild's tenure, force him to resign, or terminate his employment and affiliation with the university. Additionally, the Mount should make it easier for students and Mount community members to voice their grievances, complaints, and suggestions with the school. The university could achieve these tasks through adding to the DEI and allow more student engagement with the program. The university should advertise this department every week in the Weekly Updates. This would allow student voices to be better heard and it would allow students to have a larger impact on how the Mount grows and evolves. If the Mount St. Mary's University's administration does not act now then the community who has fallen in love with the school, will cease to exist and be lost forever. We need change and we need it now.

All the best,

Clayton R. Votta

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Ph.D. One of the cornerstones of American higher education is academic freedom, which preserves the intellectual integrity of our educational system and serves the public good. Academic freedom gives both faculty and students the right to express their views respectfully without fear of sanction. While everyone is free to agree or disagree with what some members of our community believe, we all have a vested interest in protecting the right to speak as private citizens. This might seem unfair in certain contexts but it does preserve a higher good. We must all work to navigate that reality together. Part of our effort to evolve into a better university, while striving for racial and social justice, is our working together to reach a greater understanding of each other's views and to discern the facts about the state of our society. This must be done with mutual respect. Next week the campus community will participate in the release of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force Action Plan as my colleague Paula Whetsel-Ribeau presents an Exploration Day session that highlights the intense and important work done during the fall semester by more than 100 faculty, students, administrators and community members. This effort provides nearly 60 initiatives to continue addressing issues of equity." *Instagram* 24 Feb. 2021.

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Arts Peter Dorsey, Ph. D. In making the decision to share a recently published opinion article by Professor Joshua Hochschild on the College of Liberal Arts' Facebook and Twitter pages, I mistakenly gave the impression that the College supports the views in the article and as a result regretfully hurt students, especially students of color. My intention was to inform readers about the op-ed in a neutral way, neither endorsing nor promoting

the views expressed by Professor Hochschild. I followed our office's regular practice of sharing information about professors' publications and other media appearances. The views expressed in the article are those of Dr. Hochschild and are not shared by the College of Liberal Arts or the university. I apologize for the hurtful role our office played in dissemination information about this article. Going forward, I will be asking CLA faculty members who publish opinion pieces to ensure that bylines that identify them as an employee of the university state that the views expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the university." *Twitter* 26 Feb. 2021, 10:12.

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