

March 12, 2008

TO: CCSU Faculty Senate  
FROM: Dr. Carl Lovitt, Provost  
SUBJECT: Investigation of Allegations Surrounding Visit to CCSU by Dr. Trita Parsi

I have investigated the allegations raised by Dr. Parsi's letter of January 30 concerning his treatment by Dr. Siamack Shojai during a visit to CCSU on January 29, 2008, to present an invited lecture and to attend a dinner in Dr. Parsi's honor. Specifically, it has been alleged that Dr. Shojai

1. Treated Dr. Parsi in an unprofessional and disrespectful manner during a question-and-answer period following your lecture;
2. Made disparaging remarks about Dr. Parsi when Dr. Shojai refused to sit beside you during the dinner;
3. Made "racist" and insulting remarks about Dr. Parsi during a radio broadcast that aired on January 30, 2008 on the Persian radio station KRSI;
4. Attributed inaccurate statements to Dr. Norton Mezvinsky during his radio broadcast.

I present my findings and conclusions concerning each of these allegations separately below.

1. Allegations Concerning the Question-and-Answer Period<sup>1</sup>

Following Dr. Parsi's lecture, Dr. Shojai was acknowledged by Dr. Mezvinsky. Dr. Mezvinsky did not identify Dr. Shojai as a Dean at CCSU and Dr. Shojai did not identify himself as either a Dean or a CCSU employee. Dr. Shojai began by indicating that he usually did not contribute to such discussions but felt compelled to do so in this instance because he believed the students in the audience would not realize that Dr. Parsi represented a highly partisan viewpoint, which Dr. Shojai characterized as "propaganda." Dr. Shojai asked Dr. Parsi if he had any relationship with the Islamic government in Iran and whether he was lobbying on their behalf. He also asked who was funding his organization, the National Iranian American Council. Next, he asked a question about Dr. Parsi's reference to a letter that had ostensibly been sent by the Iranian government to Congressman Ney, and he asked Dr. Parsi about whether he had ever recommended cutting funds to the Voice of America.

In addition to letters from Drs. Parsi and Mezvinsky, we received two letters—both from students—concerning Dr. Shojai's remarks during the Q-and-A period; both were very critical of Dr. Shojai's treatment of Dr. Parsi following the lecture. In the course of my investigation, several individuals who attended the lecture indicated to me that they considered Dr. Shojai's treatment of Dr. Parsi inappropriate, especially for someone in his position at the University. In contrast, two attendees indicated that they believed Dr. Shojai had every right to present a contrasting viewpoint and considered his comments to be both polite and articulate. Yet another attendee dismissed Dr. Shojai's comments and questions as "irrelevant."

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Conclusion: The evidence suggests that although Dr. Shojai was not identified as a university employee, he was nevertheless perceived by some to be representing the university because he is a Dean at the university. While we must respect Dr. Shojai's First Amendment right as a private citizen to express his opinions on a matter of public interest, we must also emphasize the importance for senior members of our community to model civil behavior and to treat guests of the university with the professionalism and courtesy that they have reason to expect. The University administration considers this an internal personnel matter and has handled it accordingly.

2. Allegations Concerning Insulting Behavior at Dinner

It has also been alleged that Dr. Shojai made disparaging remarks concerning Dr. Parsi when he was invited to sit beside him during the dinner following the lecture. Dr. Shojai insists that he simply declined the offer, stating that he planned to sit elsewhere.

I have given everyone who attended the dinner an opportunity to comment on whether they heard Dr. Shojai make any disparaging remarks concerning Dr. Parsi. One person stated that he had heard Dr. Mezvinsky offer Dr. Shojai a seat next to Dr. Parsi, but he had not heard his response. Everyone else specifically stated that they had not heard Dr. Shojai make any disparaging remarks concerning Dr. Parsi at the dinner. I was seated close to Dr. Parsi just before the dinner and did not hear the alleged exchange between Dr. Mezvinsky and Dr. Shojai.

Conclusion: During the course of my investigation, I found no corroborating evidence for allegations that Dr. Shojai made disparaging remarks concerning Dr. Parsi at the dinner.

3. Allegations Concerning Dr. Shojai's Radio Broadcast

Dr. Shojai's remarks were made in the context of a broadcast in Farsi at a radio station in New York on a weekend during which Dr. Shojai did not identify CCSU and did not identify himself as a Dean at CCSU. Such remarks constitute First Amendment protected speech made by a private citizen on a matter of public interest and are beyond the scope of this investigation. Nevertheless, the following are my observations in connection with the allegation that Dr. Shojai made "racist" remarks about Dr. Parsi during his radio broadcast.

I have reviewed two translations of the radio broadcast. The first translation was prepared by Dr. Parsi. A second translation was commissioned from Baystate Interpreters, a certified transcription and translation agency in Worcester, Massachusetts.

A meticulous analysis of these two translations reveals that there is not a single exchange in the broadcast that specifically references "race," although there is an exchange that focuses on national origins. This exchange begins with the following observation from the interviewer, Mr. Maybodi:

Parsi Translation: *Well now we know that a hypothesis regarding TP Indian heritage is refuted. The claim that he cannot speak Farsi is also debunked due to your testimony that TP knows Farsi and has no accent. In other words, he speaks Farsi with normal accent like you and me. His English is excellent and it does not seem that he be very intelligent. Won't you say?*

Certified Baystate Interpreters' Translation: *M: [ . . . ] I had heard he was an Indian, with no knowledge of Persian language. In fact, he knows Persian well and has no accent, meaning he speaks Persian like you and I and his English is also excellent. It is wonderful. But it seems, he is not very bright, true?*

Here are the two translations of Dr. Shojai's response to that statement:

Parsi Translation: *Mr. Maybodi his facial color is similar to Pakistani's and Indians or even people from Afghanistan. It is possible that he has a dual origin and his father or his mother be from one of these neighboring countries. Of course, Afghanistan once was and still is, based on my opinion, part of Iran. It is possible that Trita Parsi has such a dual origin.*

Certified Baystate Interpreters' Translation: *Mr. Maybodi, his face looks like Indian or Pakistani or Afghani. There is a possibility that he might be coming from a mixed background. For example his father or his mother could be from one of these neighboring countries where Afghanistan is really part of Iran. In any case, personally I believe he might be coming from this kind of background.*

Conclusion: The two translations do not appreciably differ in their rendition of this passage. I have also reviewed four other translations of this broadcast. All reveal differences in word choices comparable to the ones reflected in the two above. For example, what one translation renders as "facial color" another renders as "features," while another translation states that "his face looks like," etc. Similarly, what one translation renders as "dual origin" another translates as "mixed blood," and yet another as "mixed background."

With so many subtle differences in translation, each with its own authoritative claim of accuracy, it would be fruitless to affirm a particular translation as definitive. Yet, regardless of which English words are closest to the ones used in Farsi, the context makes it clear that Dr. Shojai's comments come in response to the interviewer's suggestion that Dr. Parsi may be from a country other than Iran. Dr. Shojai would appear to be making an inference about Dr. Parsi's national origin based on his physical appearance. Neither translation suggests an intention to demean or negatively stereotype Dr. Parsi based on his national origin or his appearance. Neither translation supports the conclusion that Dr. Shojai made or intended to make "racist" remarks concerning Dr. Parsi.

Questions have also been raised about Dr. Shojai's insulting remarks concerning Dr. Parsi's intelligence during the broadcast. Readers of the translations may draw their own conclusions about these remarks. The thrust of Dr. Shojai's remarks is that Dr. Parsi is an intelligent man who was nevertheless not smart enough to conceal what Dr. Shojai characterized as his "true" political allegiances. There is no basis for inferring a connection between Dr. Shojai's remarks about Dr. Parsi's possible national origin and his intelligence. The remarks about Dr. Parsi's intelligence are clearly marked in the translation as a separate topic from his preceding speculation about Dr. Parsi's national origin:

Certified Baystate Interpreters' Translation: *About his intelligence, Mr. Maybodi, in my opinion he is intelligent enough to go to university and earns a classic education, makes the grade to receive a degree.*

#### 4. Attribution of Inaccurate Statements to Dr. Mezvinsky

Dr. Mezvinsky alleges that Dr. Shojai misrepresented during his broadcast a private exchange between the two of them concerning the decision to invite Dr. Parsi and the commitment of the Middle Eastern Lecture Series to provide a balance of opposing viewpoints. Dr. Mezvinsky alleges that this misrepresentation has harmed him professionally and undermined the credibility of the Middle Eastern Lecture Series. Dr. Mezvinsky's complaint is based on the following statements in Trita Parsi's translation of the broadcast:

*The person in charge of this center has recently met me because it has only been 7 months since my entrance here. He told me that I need to sit down with you and see if you have a list of guests that I have to invite here as well. I said, sure. He was almost apologetic toward me and asked for forgiveness. He said it seems Trita Parsi gave us one-sided information, but I want to ask if you can introduce someone to us so that we gain a full and balanced picture. In order to prevent lobbying in an academic environment and prevent penetration of their agenda among us.*

When I interviewed Dr. Shojai about this allegation, he gave the following interpretation of the exchange:

*Dr. Mezvinsky told me he had invited Dr. Trita Parsi to give a lecture on our campus. I told him Dr. Parsi and his organization had strong ties to the Islamist government in Iran. He said he did not know about this connection and promised he would arrange for someone to provide the opposing viewpoint.*

Conclusion: Dr. Mezvinsky and Dr. Shojai acknowledge that they discussed this matter prior to Dr. Parsi's visit. Moreover, both agree to a considerable extent about what they discussed and said to one another. Both agree that Dr. Shojai indicated that Dr. Parsi's views were closely aligned with those of the Islamist government in Iran. Both agree that Dr. Mezvinsky invited Dr. Shojai to give him the names of possible speakers to counterbalance Dr. Parsi's position and that he would consider Dr. Shojai's suggestions. However, Dr. Mezvinsky is adamant that he never apologized for inviting Dr. Parsi and never accepted Dr. Shojai's characterization of Dr. Parsi's political allegiances. Because Dr. Shojai and Dr. Mezvinsky were the only parties to the conversation, it is impossible to verify what either said to the other.

### Summary

In conclusion, when guests are invited to our campus, they should be treated with respect, regardless of their viewpoint. There is always room for intellectual debate, but it is expected that members of the community, while entitled to express their views, will support efforts to promote a more civil environment on our campus. This has clearly not always been the case and, thus, the University regrets any inhospitable impressions left with Dr. Parsi.

Further, there is no evidence of racial slurs, either intended or unintended. Also, there was no attempt by Dr. Shojai to represent the views of the University in his questioning of Dr. Parsi at his lecture or on the radio broadcast in question. He never mentioned Central Connecticut State University, his position at the University, nor the School of Business.

cc: John W. Miller, President  
Timothy Craine, President, Faculty Senate  
Siamack Shojai, Dean, School of Business, CCSU  
Norton Mezvinsky, CSU Distinguished Professor of History