



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 25, 2013

## Fla. University Apologizes for Class Activity Denigrating Jesus' Name

Florida Atlantic University has apologized for the actions of one of its instructors after he allegedly forced students in a class to denigrate the name of Jesus. According to the [Miami Herald](#), in early March Dr. [Deandre Poole](#), who teaches Intercultural Communications at the university, directed students in the class to take out a sheet of paper and write "Jesus" in bold letters and place the paper on the floor. He then ordered the the class to stomp on the paper — and Jesus' name.



One of the students, junior Ryan Rotela, said that when he refused to comply he was kicked out of the class. Rotela, who is a devout Mormon, explained his refusal to obey Poole, saying that "anytime you stomp on something it shows that you believe that something has no value. So if you were to stomp on the word Jesus, it says that the word has no value." Rotela said that when he went to university officials to complain, he was summarily suspended from the class and told to have no contact with other students in the class until the situation was resolved.

Noemi Marin, director of the university's school of communication and multimedia studies, defended Poole's actions, telling [Fox News](#) that "as with any academic lesson, the exercise was meant to encourage students to view issues from many perspectives, in direct relation with the course objectives." Marin added that "while at times the topics discussed may be sensitive, a university environment is a venue for such dialogue and debate."

The university noted that the stomping activity comes straight out the of the book used in Poole's course. In fact, the teacher's manual for that textbook, entitled *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach*, includes the following lesson plan, apparently designed to spark students to consider the power of symbols in culture:

This exercise is a bit sensitive, but really drives home the point that even though symbols are arbitrary, they take on very strong and emotional meanings. Have the students write the name JESUS in big letters on a piece of paper. Ask the students to stand up and put the paper on the floor in front of them with the name facing up. Ask the students to think about it for a moment. After a brief period of silence, instruct them to step on the paper. Most will hesitate. Ask why they can't step on the paper. Discuss the importance of symbols in culture.

Rotela recalled that when Poole directed his students to stomp on their papers with Jesus' name written on them, "I picked up the paper from the floor and put it right back on the table." He said he then told Dr. Poole, "With all due respect to your authority ... I do not believe what you told us to do was appropriate. I believe it was unprofessional and I was deeply offended by what you told me to do." While Rotela's candor led to his suspension from the class, the uproar that followed prompted the school to issue an apology and emphasize that the lesson will not be used at the university in the future. "We sincerely apologize for any offense this has caused," the [university said in a statement](#). "Florida Atlantic University respects all religions and welcomes people of all faiths, backgrounds and beliefs."



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Contrary to Rotela's version of what happened, the university insisted in the statement that "no students were forced to take part in the exercise," and "the instructor told all of the students in the class that they could choose whether or not to participate.... We can confirm that no student has been expelled, suspended or disciplined by the University as a result of any activity that took place during this class."

Nonetheless, Paul Kengor, executive director of the Center for Vision and Values at Grove City College, told Fox News' Todd Starnes that denigrating the Christian faith is becoming all too common at universities across the nation. "These are the new secular disciples of 'diversity' and 'tolerance,'" Kengor said, "empty buzzwords that make liberals and progressives feel good while they often refuse to tolerate and sometimes even assault traditional Christian and conservative beliefs."

He said that such activities as Poole forced on his students reflect "the rising confidence and aggression of the new secularists and atheists, especially at our sick and surreal modern universities." Kengor emphasized that only the name of Jesus was used in the activity, adding, "Gee, I wonder if the instructor would dare do this with the name of Mohammed?"

Incidentally, in addition to his duties at the university, Poole also serves as vice chairman of the Palm Beach County, Florida, Democratic Party. According to the [Palm Beach Post](#), this is by no means the first time one of the party's county functionaries has been cited in an embarrassing news story. Last September, Palm Beach County Democratic chairman Mark Alan Siegel was forced to resign after he was quoted as saying that Christians who support Israel really "want us to be there so we can all be slaughtered or converted on the second coming of Jesus Christ." Siegel later apologized for his remarks.



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