

Gary J. Ferland

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From: Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
Sent: Thursday, October 18, 2007 6:52 PM  
To: gary@pa.uky.edu  
Subject: RE:

Gary,

Thanks for your insights. I have spoken to the Colonel about this matter, she even downloaded and read through part of his tract on religion and science. But I will bring up the issue again to her in light of the biologists' response. I do understand their sensitivity to the evolution issue. But we are not looking for someone to teach evolution. I find the biologists' responses to be a bit on the emotional side. One claimed he "ripped in" to Gaskell when Gaskell was here a few years ago. A Chuck Norris wanna-be, I assume.

And you are right that Gaskell would be a real leader. Even when he was here, he insisted upon going up to the observatory the night of his interview (despite bad weather) to work with the telescope, look through it at a terrestrial object, etc. In so doing, he identified a number of issues we may have to deal with, for example, the telescope cannot see below 25 degrees, he suggested an extension to the pier. And he suggested elevating the dome floor and a way to deal with disability access.

And, yes, we do need a leader. As you say, no one on the current faculty has the time or the expertise to develop the observatory. Martin would have both. And if he took some time to publish papers, what is the down side of that? As Mike pointed out, Martin would most probably work with undergraduates. He would probably have difficulty attracting graduate students since they would more likely be drawn to regular faculty. But undergraduate research is something this department has long sought to foster.

I really think that we are fortunate to be in a position to get Gaskell. His flaws, as you say, are the only reason he is available to us. I am willing to take the chance on those flaws, especially since he generated no controversy at Nebraska.

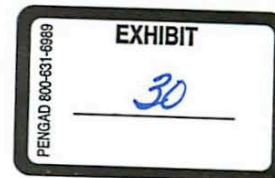
But I'll bet it won't happen. Tim's a nice guy but he has no experience working with observatories. And the other guy seems nice enough and is working at a comparable observatory. But he seems a bit on the sky side, and he is probably not a real leader.

I'm about to go home, consult with the Colonel, and have some happy sauce.

Tom

At 04:55 PM 10/18/2007, you wrote:

> > some of the right wing in me. Am I getting old? If we were  
> > proposing to  
> > hire Gaskell to do biology public outreach, the situation  
>  
> have you sought advice from The Colonel? I talked to Ann about this on  
> the way up, and she was the one who brought up Rush Limbaugh.  
>  
> Alan Sandage has kept his mouth shut about this, and apparently Gaskell  
> did too while at Nebraska. this issue is a flaw with Gaskell, but if  
> he did not have a serious flaw a person with this background would not  
> be available to us for this job.



>

>if it hinges on this issue, then a grave injustice is being done. I  
>think we agree on this. There is the analogy to Jews in Germany in  
>1930's - the Christian churches who stood by as things got worse and  
>worse were, in the end, almost as guilty as the national socialists.  
>this is a form of Nazi behavior, as Rush Limbaugh would be the first to point out.

>

>the other problem is the mindset within the dept, which is to give  
>minimum worth to the 100 level courses. if we were a healthy  
>department and knew of the importance of these courses, there would be  
>no end of good people who want to step up and make the observatory  
>successful. in the end it will be you, me, Keith, and Mike C. A weak  
>director, like the second two in the current round, will be a follower of this core of  
highly distracted faculty.

>Gaskell would be a person who would step up, into a leadership position  
>with a vision, who would make it happen.

>

>Gary

Gary J. Ferland

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From: Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
Sent: Friday, October 19, 2007 10:31 AM  
To: Gary J. Ferland  
Subject: Gaskell almost certainly a dead duck

Gary,

Just a small update. Keith came to my office today to give me his schedule so I can plan for the next observatory committee meeting. At our last meeting, he proposed either of the other two candidates, saying they would be more "malleable". Today (although he emphasized that we should discuss all these matters at the meeting), he indicated that the public views all sciences as a single entity. So Martin's views on biology are very relevant to our position in astronomy, at least from the outreach perspective. I am certain that an argument like this will be the official reason for choosing another applicant. Unfortunately, neither of the other top applicants (nor any of the other applicants, to our knowledge) is likely to provide the leadership that Martin can provide. And, as you correctly point out, no one else now in the department has the motivation or expertise to do so. (So the question becomes, who here in the department will mold the malleable?) I will probably resign from the observatory committee at some time in the future, possibly near future. Fortunately, the success or lack thereof of the observatory will play no role in my career. I would like to see it succeed. I fear it is getting off to a bad start.

Tom





**Bender, Patty**

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**From:** Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
**Sent:** Friday, October 19, 2007 4:57 PM  
**To:** Mike Cavagnero  
**Subject:** The Gaskell affair

Mike,

I'd like to take this opportunity to let you know how distressed I am about the Martin Gaskell affair. (At the same time, there is nothing I ask you to do about this situation, nor do I believe you have done anything wrong. I write this text mostly as therapy.)

It has become clear to me that there is virtually no way Gaskell will be offered the job despite his qualifications that stand far above those of any other applicant. Other reasons will be given for this choice when we meet Tuesday. In the end, however, the real reason why we will not offer him the job is because of his religious beliefs in matters that are unrelated to astronomy or to any of the duties specified for this position. (For example, the job does not involve outreach in biology.)

This choice, which I now view as inevitable, will be unfortunate. For one, we will have repudiated any claim to honoring the principles of diversity that are so piously proclaimed on this campus. Also, we will have lost the best opportunity we have to make the observatory project really succeed. As you probably realize, there is no one on the faculty with the time and expertise to shape the development of a small optical observatory. (There is, therefore, no one to mold the "malleable", as some applicants have been described.) So we will be particularly dependent upon the experience, knowledge and vision of the observatory director. Martin, in my professional judgment, has all of these qualities in abundance. The best we can say about the other applicants is that they may reach Martin's levels over time.

If Martin were not so superbly qualified, so breathtakingly above the other applicants in background and experience, then our decision would be much simpler. We could easily choose another applicant, and we could content ourselves with the idea that Martin's religious beliefs played little role in our decision. However, this is not the case. As it is, no objective observer could possibly believe that we have excluded Martin on any basis other than religious. Martin forces us to confront a perfect ethical storm. Just how committed are we to diversity and to religious freedom?

I fully realize that there are forces at work here far beyond my own control or even yours. I realize that my opinion on this matter will carry very little weight against these forces. And I realize that you have tried throughout the process to be fair to all parties concerned.

I have already stated my opinion to the observatory committee during our last meeting. As of now, at least, I plan to remain largely silent at our next meeting (uncharacteristic, I know!). With my opinion now known, and with little to offer regarding the relative merits of the other two top applicants, I will let others make this decision. If things go as I anticipate (I could be wrong!), then I will be left saddened and wondering what role I might wish to play in the observatory project in the future.

Tom





**Bender, Patty**

**From:** Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
**Sent:** Sunday, October 21, 2007 4:24 PM  
**To:** Mike Cavagnero  
**Subject:** Re: The Gaskell affair



Mike,

Thank you for your very thoughtful reply to my message. I certainly believe that you have done your best to handle this difficult matter fairly and wisely. (Consulting the biologists, however, may have been a strategic mistake.) And I do not wish to suggest that other committee members have acted in bad faith.

Clearly, there is little support for Gaskell on the committee. (Keith made his point of view clear at our last meeting, and, obviously, his opinion will be given very high weight.) Clearly, Gaskell will not be offered the job, and we will never know just how much the evolution issue influenced that decision.

As you know, I think it would be a great mistake to deny ourselves the advantages of Gaskell's vast experience. (His career in research astronomy plays little role in my thinking except that it establishes unquestionably that he is a mainline astronomer, not a quack.) But there is no need for me to make this point again to the committee, I said it already.

What worries me now are the perceptions of others, especially if Gaskell should ever question why he was rejected in favor of, say, Tim

Knauer. How would we explain why Gaskell was rejected in favor of an applicant who has never had any association with an observatory, has never been employed in an astronomy-related position (other than some astronomy teaching as an overload) and has had essentially no experience in public outreach? (True, our case would be somewhat stronger if we offered the job to Sykes.) But even so, why would we not be vulnerable to the claim that Gaskell was evaluated at least in part on the basis of a criterion (his personal beliefs on biological evolution) unrelated to the published job description, a criterion not applied to any other applicant? (Our communications with the biologists would support this claim.) How would we defend ourselves against the claim that Gaskell was merely exercising his free speech rights in commenting as a private citizen on a matter for which he has no professional expertise? Any argument that we are evaluating Gaskell's "scholarship" in the matter of biological evolution is misleading. He has no training in the field, and he has no scholarship to offer us since he has never published a peer-reviewed paper on the subject.

With all of these foreseeable questions, how well do you think we would be able to defend ourselves with the argument that Gaskell is not a good listener? Would not a skeptical third party, aware of our consultations with the biologists (and of their replies), be highly inclined to believe that the biological evolution issue played a big part in our decision?

In short, I fear we are in troubled waters ethically, and, perhaps, legally. We need to give careful attention not only to what we think but also to what others might think. I think we need to consult with UK legal counsel (or some other UK official familiar with the relevant law) to make sure we are not making procedural or legal mistakes. (You recall the time UK legal counsel visited the Chair's office and declared us in serious violation of Kentucky labor law.)

I strongly advocate that the committee (or a subset thereof, including me) meet soon with a knowledgeable UK official to make sure that our procedures do not violate UK regulations or the law.

Let me say again that I believe you have done your best to deal with this matter equitably. How could you have known it would become so complicated?

I'll drop by your office tomorrow., I would like to discuss these matters briefly with you face to face. Is there any time in the morning that would be convenient for you?

Tom

At 07:54 PM 10/19/2007, you wrote:

>Tom,

>  
>I also feel badly about the way things have developed, though I'm not  
>sure that all committee members share your certainty that Martin is the  
>right guy for the job, irrespective of his religious beliefs. I am also  
>not sure that Martin is the best candidate; though I acknowledge that  
>he is easily the best astronomer. Because of this, I think you may be a  
>bit unfair in accusing your fellow committee members of being swayed by  
>the evolution debate.  
>  
>Here is my best guess (let's get to the committee meeting and see if  
>I'm right!). Please don't spread it around.  
>  
>Sally, I think, would not put Martin first, because she felt that he  
>was not a good listener, and would not be able to develop good rapport  
>with school teachers (who need a lot of hand-holding). Of course, it is  
>difficult to know how much of Sally's feelings are due to this or due  
>to what she sees as problems likely to arise from Martin's rejection of  
>evolution. But I'm pretty sure that she wouldn't put him first. (I also  
>think this is a disappointment to her, since she may have held some  
>hope that a Ph.D. Director could work (as PI) with her in developing  
>funding sources that could support her as an outreach  
>consultant.)  
>  
>Steve, I think, would also not put Martin first, because Martin is  
>essentially a faculty member and so, in Steve's mind, will be  
>perennially unhappy with a staff job. Also, I think Steve worries about  
>having a staff member who is a cut above other staff members in the  
>eyes of the faculty. I wouldn't blame him for thinking this way, if he  
>actually does. And it is something for a chair to worry about.  
>  
>Isaac, of course, is one of the people who first raised the alarm about  
>Martin, not out of a lack of respect for Martin's religious freedom,  
>but because of what he saw as the inevitable consequences that we are  
>now experiencing. Obviously, he was quite right to warn us that this  
>was going to be a problem. I suspect that Isaac thinks there is no  
>point in even considering Martin, and so won't want us to waste our  
>time by considering him.  
>  
>The GA's also put Martin last in their list; you told us that they did  
>not find him as easy to talk with as the other two candidates. And that  
>is also something to think about.  
>  
>That leaves you, Nancy, and Gary (if he's voting) supporting Martin on  
>the strength of his experience and on the quality of his research.  
>  
>I don't want to say what Keith thinks about all this, because he told  
>me in confidence, and I think he will tell everyone else at the  
>committee meeting.  
>  
>As for me, I was all for Martin at the start, even since I spoke with  
>him in Nebraska, and even after I read his website and learned of his  
>talk on our campus ten years ago. As I said in my earlier email, nobody's perfect.  
>But I also think that he is not a great listener, that he probably  
>doesn't suffer fools (like me) gladly, and that he might be difficult  
>for a chair to manage (which was the case with the last two chair's in  
>NE). Also, taking nothing away from Martin, I was really impressed by  
>how much Tim Knauer wants this job ... he has been hustling everybody  
>... even people like Straley who were not in the loop. And Tim had at  
>least 10 ideas that none of the other candidates had, and which had not  
>occurred to any of us. In some sense, Tim is closer to the level of the  
>potential users of the facility than Martin is, and so may be more  
>persuasive in enlisting peoples interest and support.  
>  
>And to be honest, there is a part of me that, as Chair, will be worried



>every time Martin steps in front of a TV camera, has a radio interview,  
>or judges biology projects at a science fair. And as Director, he will  
>do all three.

>I feel like I have contributed to making a big mess out of this  
>situation, and yet I'm not sure what I've done wrong. Worst of all, I  
>genuinely like Martin, and if there is no chance we will hire him, then  
>I feel badly for leading him even this far down the path.

>In any event, you should not remain silent. Nor should you divorce  
>yourself from the Observatory whomever we hire. We are not doing this  
>for ourselves, we are doing it for UK, and for the kids we teach; and  
>they are the ones who will be let down if any of us bows out.

>Mike

>Thomas H. Troland wrote:

>>Mike,

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>>about the Martin Gaskell affair. (At the same time, there is nothing  
>>I ask you to do about this situation, nor do I believe you have done  
>>anything wrong. I write this text mostly as therapy.)

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>>be offered the job despite his qualifications that stand far above  
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>>specified for this position. (For example, the job does not involve  
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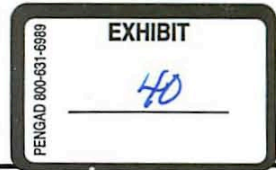
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>>control or even yours. I realize that my opinion on this matter will  
>>carry very little weight against these forces. And I realize that you  
>>have tried throughout the process to be fair to all parties concerned.

>>I have already stated my opinion to the observatory committee during  
>>our last meeting. As of now, at least, I plan to remain largely silent at

>>our next meeting (uncharacteristic, I know!). With my opinion now  
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>>other two top applicants, I will let others make this decision. If  
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>>saddened and wondering what role I might wish to play in the  
>>observatory project in the future.  
>>  
>>Tom





Gary J. Ferland

From: Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
Sent: Tuesday, October 23, 2007 5:55 PM  
To: macadam@uky.edu; levenson@pa.uky.edu; shlosman@pa.uky.edu; gary@pa.uky.edu; ellis@pa.uky.edu; mike@pa.uky.edu; shafer@pa.uky.edu  
Subject: Report to the Chair r.e. committee decision

To the Observatory Committee,

As all of you know who attended today's Observatory Committee meeting, the committee voted to recommend that the observatory director position be offered to Tim Knauer. Among those committee members present (Troland, Shlosman, Shafer, Ellis and MacAdam), the vote was 4 in favor of Knauer and 1 in favor of Gaskell. If Nancy Levenson's earlier e-mail still reflects her opinion, she would have also voted for Gaskell. No member of the committee supported Quinn Sykes.

Mike Cavagnero explained that the Committee Chair (Troland) should write a brief statement reflecting the sense of the committee and its rationale. This statement, Mike said, may also reflect a minority view. The statement is to be directed to Mike who will forward the committee statement and his own analysis to the Dean. The Dean will make the final decision regarding the observatory director position.

Here is my first draft of that statement. Please let me know if you have any comments, corrections or additions. I particularly invite other committee members to suggest additional text regarding Tim Knauer if they feel I have left out any important items. (Nancy - I have not included you in the minority view because I do not presume to know your detailed thoughts on the matter. If you wish to be included, please let me know.)

\*\*\*\*\* DRAFT \*\*\*\*\* October 23, 2007

Dear Mike,

As you know, the Observatory Committee met today to consider its recommendation for the student observatory director position. By a vote of 4 to 1 among those present, the committee recommends that the position be offered to Tim Knauer.

The majority of the committee feels that Knauer is the best choice owing in part to his notable enthusiasm, creativity and energy. They believe that Knauer works well with his colleagues, and he will grow into all aspects of the job as observatory director. They see Knauer as possessing an intuitive understanding of how students learn and as having a good work ethic (based upon his prior employment in the Department). The majority also believes that Knauer has a good understanding of the needs of K12 teachers, although he does not at present have experience working with them directly. Despite his relatively limited experience with some aspects of the observatory director responsibilities, the majority of the committee is confident that Knauer's passion for astronomy and his vision for the observatory's potential will serve him well and that he will be very successful in the position. The majority also notes that Knauer was a successful instructor of astronomy survey courses which he taught as an overload while employed previously in the Department.

A minority of the committee (Troland) favors Martin Gaskell. Troland believes that Gaskell's considerable experience with virtually all aspects of the observatory's mission makes him

dramatically more qualified for the position. Gaskell is a Ph.D. astronomer with 26 years of postdoctoral experience in academic institutions. Gaskell has already established a similar student observatory at the University of Nebraska. He has worked extensively with undergraduate students at all levels (including upper level undergraduate research). He has had considerable experience with astronomy outreach activities including open observatory nights, public lectures, school planetarium shows and telescope making workshops. Knauer, in comparison, has had little or no experience with optical observatories nor with undergraduate astronomy research nor with astronomy outreach, nor has he ever been employed in an astronomy-related position other than as a part time astronomy instructor at UK. Under these circumstances, Troland believes it would be far wiser to offer the position to Gaskell.

**Bender, Patty**

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From: Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
Sent: Monday, November 19, 2007 6:39 PM  
To: Bender, Patty; Michael A. Kovash  
Subject: RE: observatory director

Patty,

Thank you for the two messages regarding your review of the observatory director's hiring process. I recognize that the decision on this position has been made. And it is just as well that this decision was judged defensible from a legal perspective.

From a moral perspective, however, I find the decision indefensible. I was part of the entire process that led to this decision. I know what observatory committee members said in meetings and privately, not just their e-mail comments. I know that the university (not your office!) chose an applicant with almost no relevant experience over one with immense experience in virtually every aspect of the observatory director's duties. And I know that this choice was made (to a significant extent) on grounds that have nothing to do with the job as advertised nor with the job as envisioned by our department. In particular, the job has nothing to do with biology. Applicant Gaskell has no science to offer in biology since he is not trained nor does he publish in this field. All he has in biology are personal opinions, much as I have personal opinions about global warming even though I have no scientific expertise in that field.

In short, applicant Gaskell was judged on his personal beliefs, beliefs unrelated to the job he applied for. This choice was unconscionable, and it brings shame upon all who were part of it, including me. I do realize, however, that you were not part of this decision.

Sadly, my belief in the integrity of the University of Kentucky and in its commitment to fairness and diversity has suffered greatly as a result of these events. I never thought I would have this experience after 26 years of employment here.

Sincerely,

Tom Troland





Gary J. Ferland

From: Thomas H. Troland [troland@pa.uky.edu]  
Sent: Tuesday, January 15, 2008 5:17 PM  
To: Martin Gaskell  
Subject: Re: Observatory



Martin,

Yes, I imagine that you inferred long ago the outcome of our observatory director search process. Still, I was surprised to learn recently that you (and other applicants, too) had not been officially notified of our decision.

Hiring decisions are always difficult, discussions among Search Committee members sometimes contentious, and opinions expressed about these personnel matters are, I presume, confidential. Nonetheless, I believe it is fair to share with you a few relevant pieces of information, all of which I know to be true.

For one, I disagreed with the recommendation by the Search Committee to the Dean. (Such disagreements are not, of course, unusual in hiring matters.) I saw you as an exceptionally qualified candidate for the position, I felt you were the best choice among the applicants, and I so stated to the committee. I understand that you are deeply religious, and I respect your beliefs. More to the point, I know of no reason why your religious beliefs would have affected your performance of any of the duties associated with our position.

Second, Gary recused himself from the recommendation process by the Search Committee because he was unable, for obvious reasons, to participate in any of the candidate interviews.

Finally, biologists here at UK were consulted regarding your views. The justification given for this consultation was that we were entitled to examine the scholarship of job applicants for the position. I do not feel I can release to you the e-mail reply we received from the biologists since I assume it was given in confidence on a personnel matter. However, it is fair to state that the biologists expressed great concern about some of your beliefs based upon information contained on your website and based upon some of their memories of the presentation you gave here at UK a few years ago. Naturally, their concerns did not relate to matters of astronomy for which they have no professional expertise. One of the biologists who was party to this e-mail reply is the current Chair of the UK Department of Biology, Shelly Steiner. If you wish to contact him, you are obviously free to do so as he speaks officially for that department.

On a personal level, I am disappointed by the outcome of the observatory director search process, although I do believe that the individual we hired is capable of managing the project. I, for one, would have very much welcomed your considerable expertise in directing the observatory, and I felt that you would bring much valuable experience to all aspects of the project. I also very much appreciated your thoughtful e-mail critique of the observatory design as well as your suggestions for improvement. However, my view on the observatory director position was not universally held by members of the Search Committee. This is not the first time that the Physics & Astronomy Department has failed to heed my advice! And it will probably not be the last.

You have my very best wishes for the future. I wish I could have welcomed you here as a professional colleague in both education and research.

Tom

At 05:51 PM 1/14/2008, you wrote:

>Hi Tom,

>

> don't worry about the delay. When I didn't hear anything by  
>mid November I just assumed that the department had made an offer to  
>one of the other short-listed candidates.

>

> I hope things work out well with the observatory and  
>observatory director and, in particular, that he understands about the  
>floor problem I e-mailed about after my visit. I never got any  
>response to my e-mail about this, but I'd be happy to give advice on  
>the floor question, or any other observatory issue.

>

> Gary was concerned, as I'm sure he'll have told you, that my  
>religious beliefs were brought up by some people. Gary told me that  
>the chairman of Biology (Sheldon Steiner?) had sent an e-mail to the  
>dean expressing his strong opposition to the Physics Department hiring  
>me. It had been a major surprise for me during the interview when Mike  
>Cavagnero asked me directly about my religious beliefs. I now guess  
>Mike was looking for some ammunition to defend a possible job offer to  
>me by Physics & Astronomy against attacks from the biology chair.

>

> Could you get me a copy of the Biology chair's e-mail? I'd  
>like to telephone him to talk about it in person. My Christian faith  
>has, in fact, never been a controversial issue in the classroom, or in  
>outreach, and your Biology chair really needs to know this.

>

>All the best,

>

>Martin

>

>-----  
>Martin Gaskell                      E-mail: gaskell@astro.as.utexas.edu  
>Astronomy Department              Office: RLM 17.202  
>University of Texas                Tel:     (512) 471-1348  
>Austin, TX 78712-0259              FAX:     (512) 471-6016  
><http://www.as.utexas.edu/~gaskell/>  
><http://incolor.inebraska.com/gaskell/compose.html>  
>-----

>

>On Mon, 14 Jan 2008, Thomas H. Troland wrote:

>

> > Martin,

> >

> > I was surprised to learn recently from Gary Ferland that you had not  
> > been notified about the outcome of our search for an observatory  
> > director. As Gary must have told you, the job was filled late last  
> > year by Mr. Timothy Knauer.

> >

> > I am embarrassed that we have taken so long to notify you of this  
> > decision. I realize that our delay is not helpful to job applicants  
> > who are trying to plan for future employment.

> >

> > Although my apologies for our delay are of no particular help to  
> > you, I offer them, nonetheless.

> >

> > Sincerely,  
> >  
> > Tom  
> >