

Interview with Bill Case (full panel)

2/29/08, 7:57 a.m.

753 Engineering Sciences Building

Roy Nutter: Explained Jan Boyles' role as recorder. Also explained that information may be made public through Freedom of Information Act requests. Asks Case for general background.

Bill Case: My name is Bill Case. I'm the executive officer for communication. I report to the president in this position. I advise on communication strategies. I work with all the president's cabinet, the provost, chief of staff, legal counsel and other members on communication issues related to all university business. I also supervise News and Information Services for the university, headed by Amy Neil.

BC: As for my history – I came here in 1985 as an agriculture writer. I worked for the Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences for three, four years. Then, I moved to Health Sciences, serving as the news media manager starting in 1990/1991. I worked there continuously until 2001 when I was recruited into the West Virginia governor's office as the communication director for Bob Wise. I worked there for a year. Then, I returned to the university in 2002. I had a different position at Health Sciences as the director of media communication. I handled all media communication for the Health Sciences hospital and healthcare system. When Mike Garrison was selected as president, I was asked to move to the president's office as communication director. I've been there since July 2007.

BC: I earned my undergrad at McAllister College in Minnesota. I earned my master's in journalism at WVU while an employee as a part time student. Took me 10 years. I earned the degree in 1995.

Art Centonze: We heard from [Dean] Sears that he made the decision to award Bresch the degree on October 22 – one week after a meeting that you had with Craig Walker, Jerry Lang, Steve Sears, Jerry Blakely and Paul Speaker. What do recall about that meeting?

BC: There were two meetings. One was informal. Held in office directly across hall from Craig Walker's. Received a call to come over. Recall the meetings, not the dates. At the meeting, we discussed the discrepancy between Admissions/Records and what Heather Bresch recalled. The business school folks were asked to resolve. At the second meeting, there was Lang, folks from business, Dean Sears. They made the determination that she indeed had [earned the degree] – to the surprise all of us. Normally, A/R has all the right data. A decision was made and we had to communicate that decision to her. They would send information to A/R. I'm not sure about dates. I even checked my calendar before I came here. The meetings were not on my calendar. Meetings and dates are hard for me, but I'll tell you what I remember.

John Burkoff: Who was at that first meeting?

BC: Lang, Dean, Walker and there may have been someone else.

AC: Was this an early morning meeting?

BC: I can't tell you that. I do know it was during the course of work day.

AC: With regard to the dates, we were told there was a meeting on Oct. 15, a couple of days after the university was informed [of the matter]. Sears said to us that he made the decision on Oct. 22. There is an e-mail from Walker to Sears, yourself on Oct. 17. There is also an e-mail from you to Walker, Lana Cantoni, Sears on Oct. 19 to go over the language of the release. Can you explain the timing? Sears said the decision was made on Oct. 22, but the e-mails suggest a decision was made earlier.

BC: When a decision was made, it was communicated verbally. We discussed how we could communicate that decision to news media without violating her privacy or giving her records up. I was brought in after the decisions were made. I don't remember the dates. Folks in COB had reviewed her records and came to conclusion. They were asked to prepare a document to provide to A/R to adjust her transcripts to reflect what they believe to be true. I approached the situation as communication person. A/R gave information to the Post-Gazette that we now believe not to be true. In the discussion -- I don't remember who suggested -- what can we tell the paper without violating privacy. It was decided to write a cover letter to go with records provided. The Dean should write and send it to them. He and Craig asked me to review that -- make sure we could give to newspaper. I made some edits -- fairly minor -- and sent it back to dean. He signed it. It was either sent with the paperwork to A/R or he gave it separately with a signed copy to give to the paper. It's my recollection that the process started after communication. Made decision. In the second meeting -- in the president's conference room -- there was Lang, two faculty members, Sears, Walker, myself. Jerry [Lang] stopped the meeting and asked -- Does everyone around the room agree that this is what happened with the student? We all did, and we moved from there. The composition of the letter was not contemplated until that was verified.

Michael Lastinger: Who was at the meeting?

BC: I didn't take notes. Speaker -- he's the former director -- he was there. The current director -- don't recall his name...

JB: Blakely.

BC: May have been someone else there...

AC: Was Macia there?

BC: May have been. The meeting was back in October...

Lori Franz: Was the question: Does everyone agree with the content of the memo?

BC: No. The question from Lang was: Does everyone agree with the conclusion that she had completed the requirements for the degree?

ML: He asked everyone in the room?

BC: He asked people from the College of Business.

LF: And everybody said, yes?

BC: Everybody present who had knowledge of her records. No one in the president's office wanted to look at her records. It started with a media inquiry. We knew whatever we did would be public. She's the daughter of the governor of West Virginia. We were careful not to bring any documents into our possession that would reflect whether or not she had her degree.

LF: So this was not a rhetorical question?

BC: No. Jerry was putting people on the record.

ML: Putting people on the record?

BC: I think so. He was also signing off on this as the provost. He was depending on their review of what went on in their college. You'd have to ask Lang of his motivation for that. He did not want a dispute or minority report or dissension. From my perspective as a PR person, it was very unusual for the university not to be able to say whether or not she had earned her degree. I mean, you run across this all the time, someone in mid-career who lied about the degree. Usually what happens, the person says I was young or a person is going 'What the hell's wrong? I had my degree 10 years ago.' From my point of view as the university's communication person, it was clearly a yes/no if she earned her degree.

JB: How do you know she said that?

BC: It was reported by Craig Walker.

JB: Is that your recollection of what he said she said?

BC: That's my best recollection. I'm not sure how many/how long the conversations [between Bresch and Walker] were. She recalled having started the program. She left the state for business reasons. She says she made arrangements with the director for her to complete the degree. She had a conversation in which she was told she was done with the requirements. She thought she was finished. She walked through the graduation ceremony and wore a cap/gown.

LF: Does that make a degree?

BC: No.

JB: Do you recall if Speaker disputed that account?

BC: I don't recall anything Speaker said. I think he was very quiet in these meetings. That conversation that Walker relayed to me was not the subject of great discussion. In the meeting I was at – they made a decision and I was brought in on how to communicate that decision without violating her privacy. Others had asked to release her transcript. We were not free to put out her transcript.

AC: You talk about the second meeting. So there were two meetings?

BC: At the first meeting, we talked about how we would respond to the Post-Gazette. The Post-Gazette was calling every day asking for an update. We came up with some sort of statement – we will review the information; we'll get back to you. After the first meeting, there was no answer to the questions. The university was in a very precarious position. We had put out one thing from the A/R office.

JB: In the first meeting, did Craig Walker share his conversation with Heather Bresch?

BC: I don't recall.

RN: Was Sears in the first meeting?

BC: I think he was there, but my memory's fuzzy. My memory is not that strong. My participation was brief – what are we going to tell the Post-Gazette folks.

AC: Was the second meeting the same day?

BC: It was several days later.

ML: Was there a time limit on what to say to the Post-Gazette?

BC: There was not a time limit, but the more time elapsed between when the university initially gave information out and when the university told that information was wrong – the less credible the university looked in terms of treating students. In most cases, if someone is asked if they had a degree -- if it takes more than a couple of hours to figure out – you have a PR problem.

ML: Do you have your degree?

BC: I do. I have my degree sitting in a drawer.

ML: Did you ask Heather Bresch if she had hers?

BC: I never talked to her.

LF: How did Heather communicate with the university about the discrepancy?

BC: The first call was to Mike Garrison because she knew him. She said, 'What's going on here – the Post-Gazette says that the registrar won't confirm my degree.' He turned that over to Craig. The first communication that I know was a call from her to Mike after she received call from Post-Gazette.

ML: Do you remember the date?

BC: I don't.

LF: Is that typical behavior – to not refer to another arm of the university?

BC: Normally, that's what Mike does. Someone calls and asks a question. He will ask Craig who is the right person to handle. That's Craig's role as chief of staff. He comes into his inbox and the president makes the decision to hand off to Craig and he hands it off to who should deal with.

JB: Do you recall in the second meeting – was it talked about that another student was present with Heather Bresch and Speaker?

BC: I heard that story along the way. I don't think it came up at the meeting.

JB: Do you remember her name? Do remember hearing the name Leah Summers?

BC: I have heard her name. I think she was Miss WV sometime.

JB: Do you know who she is now?

BC: She's an attorney at Mylan.

JB: Do you know if she came up at the meeting?

BC: No.

LF: Would she interact with the president as part of the social flow of the university? Would she sit in the press box at the game?

BC: Not to my knowledge.

LF: You are present at lots of events?

BC: Yes, at the box at football games. There are probably about 100 people in the box. A lot of donors, members of the Board of Governors. If she was one of those folks, I never saw her there. If you wanted to check, I bet you could find out. They [athletics] keep good records.

ML: Would you recognize her?

BC: Only because I saw her picture in the paper.

LF: Would you recognize Leah Summers?

BC: I met her once. I was helping to prepare another Miss WV participant. She may have been in that room when I was grilling her about current events. I would not recognize her.

RN: On a Saturday on a football weekend in Morgantown, what is your typical involvement? It's always a big production from the president's office.

BC: I'm not involved in determining who gets to go.

RN: There's always a morning brunch...

BC: He's [Garrison's] been trying to drag me into that stuff. I've been to several events. I've been to all home football games in the box. I'm there to help the media people, who will call and ask questions. I introduce myself to the out of town press there. I'm dealing with media folks, not with the social side.

LF: Is the governor typically part of these social activities?

BC: Absolutely.

LF: Is he typically always in the box?

BC: He is always invited to be in the box. He's a former football player. He loves the game.

AC: He's an alum as well?

BC: Yes.

JB: Do you recall any other conversations with Craig Walker in the fall? Any other time when you talked about this?

BC: We discussed a lot of what the Post-Gazette was planning to do with the story. They were hard on asking questions in October. They called every day, and when the school had made its determination, they continued to call. Finally, I encouraged the dean and the provost to give them a written statement that says basically, we have endorsed this.

JB: But that was after the fact. During the time, do you recall if Craig Walker stated his opinion on whether or not Heather Bresch had earned her degree?

BC: I don't think he had an opinion.

JB: He didn't share until the second meeting?

BC: Right. I never recall him having an opinion. I have no knowledge of courses [she] attended or not attended. He never expressed that he wanted a particular resolution. He was adamant that the decision happened at the level of faculty members of the college.

ML: How get did you get the information that Heather Bresch had a diploma?

BC: Originally, it was a conversation through Mike or a conversation with Craig Walker.

ML: How do you know?

BC: That's what Craig Walker told me.

JB: After Craig talked to Heather, he still had no opinion?

BC: I don't know. I don't know if he knows her.

JB: He never told you?

BC: He never told me.

JB: So he was not pressuring the dean to make a decision that gives the degree to Heather Bresch?

BC: He's the kind of guy that wouldn't do that. He was very careful, circumspect. He has his head screwed on straight. He realizes clearly that's not the role that he's in. He was gathering people to make the right decision.

LF: Did you ever have any conversation whether her allegation was true? Could she have just added to her resume and now she's trying to explain...

BC: I was never in a conversation about whether or not she had the degree.

LF: A conversation that...

BC: One person says one thing, the registrar says something else. How do we resolve the difference?

LF: Not even Craig Walker?

BC: No. I, for one, thought that possible. I thought that it could be that someone wrote down they had the degree and it caught up with them. And if that was the case, I would figure out what the university would say in that case. We would have called the Post-Gazette and say that the registrar has no record of her completing the degree.

LF: So the college was sent on a fact finding mission. Did anyone call back to Heather and do fact finding? Did anyone suggest that when the decision was made to do research in the College of Business and talk to Heather?

BC: I don't know. I don't know. I have no idea. It happened across the street in the College of Business. We never discussed how the College conducted the search of records. I know of no one who did that.

LF: If no one ever checked with Heather to say, "What happened here?"

[CROSSTALK AMONG PANELISTS]

JB: You were at the meeting when the decision was made?

BC: I had the impression that a decision was made before that meeting. The decision was made by the dean in the college and then he came back...

JB: What was your understanding of the basis for giving the degree?

BC: I thought they had looked at whatever records they had. The dean indicated records were incomplete and he gave the benefit of the doubt to the student.

ML: What records?

BC: I never saw any records.

ML: Were they academic or financial records?

BC: I don't recall any mention of financial records. I do recall some discussion that the College of Business -- after the conversion to electronic records -- had purged a room full of paper records, which no longer existed, and that was what was complicating the search.

ML: It is mentioned in the press and in e-mails that she had completed all the requirements for the degree except for a \$50 fee. Do you remember where you got that information?

BC: I can try to remember. It may have been in that second meeting. When we were discussing how it all came about, the \$50 fee came up in some context. The reason for the discrepancy was never discussed. Since alleged date of graduation, she nor anyone else

requested her transcript or filed paperwork for graduation. At no point did someone go to A/R and ask for whether a diploma was issued. We never were asked if she had graduated, and never checked her records.

ML: Do you recall who said \$50?

BC: I don't.

ML: It's in your press release.

BC: That was the information we gave to Amy Neil to go out. It could have been Craig Walker, Jerry Lang, Steve Sears. I don't recall.

JB: When Dean Sears said to give the benefit of the doubt to the student, did he say that should happen when someone appears to have a questionable case? Or did everyone have that ability?

BC: I don't think everyone was happy with it. They would have rather have had a clear answer. From my perspective, it was not my place when the dean of a college or provost say that's the decision on academic matter. My role is how to communicate that matter to the world – pro or con...

JB: Any sense this would have happened with someone who's not the governor's daughter?

BC: There was a student with a similar situation who came to the College of Business with questions about his degree from the same era. Came six to seven months before. It was resolved in that person's case.

JB: Who told you that?

BC: Either the dean or Provost Lang. I can't remember. It was referred to in terms of communication with the press – how to address other issues with student records.

JB: Do you recall anything more that was said about other students?

BC: The student was changing jobs. The student or employer made a request for a transcript and it didn't show that a degree had been granted. The dispute was resolved in that person's favor.

JB: But you don't know how that got resolved?

BC: I got the impression from Lang that there were problems with record keeping in the past, but I'm not sure what those were.

AC: Was the decision about the degree conferred back to the president?

BC: Not with me. I didn't have conversations with the president on that issue. I didn't want to be involved with it.

LF: There was some documentation. A letter was shared with Heather, and she approved its content before it was released. How was that done?

BC: Through Craig, verbally. We were worried about sharing it without her consent.

RN: Was it written consent?

BC: I never saw it.

LF: If you were concerned about consent, there's no record of verbal consent.

ML: To reveal student records, you have to have a FERPA waiver...

BC: I believe so. The letter was created not just to convey information to the registrar, but also to give something to the Post-Gazette to correct the earlier information from A/R.

ML: Are you saying the \$50 fee mention is a violation of FERPA? That she had a deficit of a particular amount?

BC: You'd have to ask a lawyer. It was not a deficit; it was a description of what happened. If you never applied for a diploma, you never received a bill.

RN: If I call WVU, and ask if Bill Case has a degree, I call the president's office, who passes it on to you. I want to know how do you verify a person has a degree.

BC: A/R will verify.

RN: Would you believe that they will not? Do you know what verifydegree.com is? They don't answer that question.

RN: If you call and pretended to be Roy Nutter...

LF: Most universities use.

BC: The fact someone has a degree is public record.

LF: Does WVU have a vice president of development or donor relations? Who would that be?

BC: We have a foundation. That person would be the president – Wayne King.

LF: So all development goes through Wayne King. Do you know if he had a conversation about the issue with the president, Craig Walker?

BC: I have no knowledge of that.

RN: I have another name for you. Steven Cutright?

BC: I don't know.

AC: Is Heather Bresch a donor to the university?

BC: I don't know.

JB: Have you had any discussion about the case with the president since?

BC: I have forwarded news stories to him.

JB: How regularly do you talk to the president?

BC: I talk with him several times a day. We have talked about how this issue affects the university, him as an individual. He knows this person. She's in a high position in an important company in West Virginia. She's related to the governor. But whether or not she earned the degree – we never discussed that.

JB: He never said anything about his opinion?

BC: No.

JB: So you only talked about PR, not the substance?

BC: Absolutely not. He never expressed an opinion about her earning the degree.

LF: There are implications for the university if this turns out bad. What worstcase scenarios did you imagine?

BC: What decisions you [Garrison] may make; how to follow up in terms of the university. The worst case scenario would be if someone felt pressured or believed they were pressured to do something to her transcript that they shouldn't have done. I know that didn't happen. I'm not worried. Unless someone created pressure in their own mind, I know that didn't happen. What the university must discuss after this is over is that our graduates' degrees are secure.

LF: Did you discuss the impact on donor relations, given the political setting of the university in the state? What kind of scenarios did you discuss?

BC: We didn't have those discussions in the fall.

ML: Back in the fall, did you think about what would happen if Heather Bresch didn't earn her degree?

BC: That would have made my job a lot easier. We discussed with our news director, Amy Neil, how to convey that to the press. Didn't discuss to Craig Walker. The governor's name really didn't come up. I didn't have a conversation with anyone in the governor's office. I gave the governor's press director a heads up on the day of the story. When it first came up, I thought she didn't have her degree; thought it was a tempest in a teapot – I thought it would affect an individual student. If someone didn't earn the degree, it would have been a one day story for us.

LF: Do you think if it were a person at a lower level – a faculty member would say – it would be awful to lose Mylan's contributions?

BC: It's hard to imagine someone thinking that. Everyone I dealt with was very clear.

LF: Is it conceivable that the dean felt pressure? That Mylan was a big donor to the college?

BC: It was not my impression of the dean. I've only known him since last summer. I've only had a couple of conversations with him. But he's not the kind of person who lives in that world. He's much more in the world of academia.

ML: So he's not very political?

BC: That's not my sense of him. I don't know him very well, though.

LF: Are you suggesting he's political naïve?

BC: No. I don't know him well enough to suggest what his political motives are. I don't see him as the person who would sacrifice the integrity of the college to avoid a media brouhaha.

ML: In your press release, you mention other students in similar situations. Did you consider how this would effect unnamed, other students?

BC: We did. There's certainly the knowledge that there's an issue of the program and how they kept records. We're dealing basically with an individual with her reputation on the line. Hers was the only name out there. Other people were not named. We weren't going to name. I still don't know the names.

ML: How many unnamed people are you talking about?

BC: That's a point well taken. I don't know a way around that issue. The knowledge was this was not an isolated case.

ML: What knowledge?

ML: [Shows BC AM 2 – redacted] Asks about the redacted portion.

BC: I believe that was my cell phone number. It has the right length of characters for a cell phone. You should get unredacted copies of those e-mails.

AC: The University first heard about the issue on Oct. 12? Is that consistent with your knowledge?

BC: It's consistent, but I can't verify.

AC: There were a couple of meetings. There was an e-mail from Craig Walker to Sears asking for the dean to draft a letter. Were you surprised at how quickly it all came together? Was a decision made without due process? Were you concerned about this?

BC: The university should be able to determine in an hour or two if she had the degree. Perhaps I was unaware of how complicated it would be for them to make that determination. It was taking a long time to see if she earned her degree.

AC: If the dean was going to give the benefit of the doubt to the student, wouldn't you want to make sure if it was a controversial issue?

Bc: Not in my [indecipherable].

JB: So you talked to the governor's PR guy?

BC: Woman, actually.

JB: Talked...

BC: I dropped her an e-mail.

JB: Did you have subsequent conversations with the governor's staff?

Bc: I didn't have conversations with them. I remember the governor said to, "call in Scotland yard" and preferred that this group meet in public.

JB: But you had no conversations subsequent to that?

BC: I was out of the picture at that point.

JB: Did you talk to anyone involved with Mylan? Did you talk before or after the process?

BC: After the story came out in December, I talked to Mylan's PR managers. They asked to be put on the list for everything given to the media.

JB: There were no other conversations?

BC: No.

JB: There are some e-mails relating to a letter signed by Dean Sears. Do you know who wrote the initial draft?

BC: I think Dean Sears.

JB: Do you recall when you received an original copy of the letter that was sent? How did you receive it?

BC: Either from Sears or Cantoni.

JB: Someone in Dean Sears office? Did you talk about the letter with Craig Walker?

BC: I don't recall. I can't say that I didn't. We have adjacent offices. I don't recall doing that.

JB: So this was ordinary stuff?

BC: In the course of issues in the president's office, it didn't seem that extraordinary. It didn't rise to the level of a four alarm fire.

JB: Did Craig Walker have input into the letter?

BC: I don't remember. It probably would have been done by e-mail.

LF: But you didn't see it as an important event?

BC: It was not a major thing in the life of the university. From my perspective, it was an unsettled question – we need to get to resolve it.

LF: Looking back, do you think it should have been taken more seriously?

BC: It was taken very seriously by the people who looked at it. If they didn't look at the records in the depth, that certainly that doesn't reflect on the university. I never looked at her transcript. I never did that for any other student either.

ML: Were you worried someone else was looking at her transcript?

BC: We learned later that someone had given a transcript to the Post-Gazette.

ML: You learned that?

BC: It was clear they had transcript information and other stuff that we had not discussed with them – information that A/R didn't have. The fact that they published things that talked about specific courses, classes, we had the impression that they had access to some records, but we never investigated.

ML: Was anyone talking about that?

BC: It would be going after a whistleblower. From a PR standpoint, that would be a negative thing to do, unless you do that every time someone improperly accesses somebody's transcript. It was pretty unusual. We encourage the panel to look at definitely the breach in confidentiality of the student record. Where that happened, we don't know.

LF: Is there anything you didn't tell us that we should know?

Interview ending time: 8:55 a.m.