

## Welcome Back, Popper<sup>1</sup>

It was not until Dr. Methem Popper’s sister called in early August that you knew where the tenured associate professor of Biology had gone. The sister, who lives in a small town 1500 miles away, was worried that perhaps her brother was going to lose his teaching job, so she had called you on her brother’s behalf. “Just tell me when Fall Term classes are scheduled to start. Yes, my brother has been living with us for the past few weeks. My husband came there and found him and brought him home. No, Meth’s not able to come to the phone right now. Oh, yes! Meth is absolutely intent on returning to campus. He says teaching will be good for him. And, he’s assured me that his problems of last spring are entirely under control... You see, Meth’s sort of like this. But this time it was the worst. I think it was his hellish marriage and all the financial trouble they were having. But she left him in June, right after the bank foreclosed on their house. Meth says that’s all in the past. Meth is a really good person. I’m sure he’s learned his lesson this time...”

After the phone call you ruminate about the events of the past spring. Popper started missing classes along about February. He called your office early March to say he was sick and could his colleagues cover his courses for a week. The Biology Department, already overworked, rallied with various faculty taking turns coving a lecture here and there. But one week turned into two and you realized that the temporizing would have to stop. So, you authorized the department Chair to look for some adjuncts. But then Popper showed up and said he was ready to work, so the Chair brought him to see you. The meeting in your office started with you simply asking how things were going. Then, suddenly, Popper started behaving with such uncharacteristic emotional volatility and aggression that you and the Chair took his car keys. The Chair called Popper’s wife to pick him up from campus. Two days later the wife phoned the Chair to apologize for Popper and to say that his doctor had diagnosed the problem as a delusional experience resulting from fatigue, stress, and medications. That was late March. The wife told the Chair that Popper would need to take some sick leave.

You directed the sick leave request to Human Resources with your approval and authorized the hire of substitute instructors. Human Resources phoned you three weeks later to say that Popper now wanted to go on disability leave. You said you would be willing to approve that, realizing that it would mean that Popper would not be back before the end of the academic year. But Popper and his doctor never did complete the paperwork for the disability leave. In June Human Resources sent Popper a certified letter demanding the tardy disability application and physician’s certification. The due day passed with no response. Fall classes will be starting in six weeks. Books have to be ordered immediately for Fall Term courses. New students need to be assigned to their academic advisors. And now Popper has resurfaced, or at least his sister has just phoned.

### Questions:

- 1) What are the range of possible things you might consider doing?**
- 2) Among these, what do you certainly do and what do you certainly not do?**
- 3) Whose interests are primary, secondary, or irrelevant, and what is your plan of action?**
- 4) Given the legal and ethical issues associated with personal privacy, how much of all of this, if any, do you share with the Department Chair or with the faculty of the Department?**

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<sup>1</sup>All characters, situations, and stories described here are fictional. No reference to actual persons, events, or institutions is intended or assumed. Drs. Peter and Noreen Facione developed and refined these hypothetical cases based on the experiences gained through their many decades of service as faculty, administrators, workshop presenters, and leadership consultants to colleges and universities throughout the nation.