

DATE: 5 May 2011

TO: Provost Gregg Kvistad
Ambassador Christopher Hill, Dean, JKSSIS
Amy King, Director of Human Resources

FR: Dean Saitta, Professor of Anthropology, DU AAUP Chapter President, and Colorado AAUP Co-President

RE: Due Process for Professor Arthur Gilbert

I'm writing to express a concern about due process in the Arthur Gilbert situation. I'm writing as a member of the DU chapter of the AAUP but not on behalf of the rest of the membership.

From the inquiries I've made since first reading about this case in last week's *Clarion* I'm not convinced that Professor Gilbert's due process rights or his right to privacy have been respected. I understand that Professor Gilbert was summarily pulled from his classroom on the basis of two anonymous student letters complaining about the content of his teaching. I understand that he was not shown these letters nor given the opportunity to respond to the allegations contained within them before being placed on paid administrative leave. I further understand that these letters have since been shown to other people expressing an interest in the case. None of this is consistent with the treatment we might reasonably expect would be afforded a 50 year veteran of DU teaching who, from time-to-time, has been prominently featured in promotional material trumpeting DU's extraordinary faculty. If there were complaints about Professor Gilbert's teaching I would expect that details would be shared with him and carefully checked before pulling him from his classroom at midterm. I understand the need to promptly address student concerns. However, the approach taken may have violated AAUP recommended policies governing investigation of complaints made in a specifically (and distinctively) *academic* setting. Minimally, I believe that Professor Gilbert has been prematurely judged and publicly humiliated before any wrong-doing has been established.

That's the process piece that concerns AAUP. The other piece is the academic freedom piece. I have no confidence that Professor Gilbert's treatment—even if he is fully exonerated of the charges against him—won't have a chilling effect on the classroom. It is well-known that Professor Gilbert teaches controversial material. Like Professor Gilbert I teach courses in that fraught and often hazardous interdisciplinary space where competing viewpoints about sex, race, power, violence, and the "nature" of humans collide. I know the beast. In 30 years of teaching I've received my share of anonymous student complaints. I know from experience how particular classroom styles and strategies can be misunderstood. It is certainly clear that a large majority of students value Professor Gilbert's teaching, as evidenced by the numerical course evaluations available on WebCentral and the many expressions of support he's received from students who have rallied to his cause. It is also clear that faculty peers and university administrators can hold a somewhat different and even prejudicial view. As evidence I attach below a copy of the memo I sent to Social Science chairs exactly one year ago responding to a negative review of a course that Professor Gilbert proposed for the social science "box" in the undergraduate Common Curriculum. I believe that Professor Gilbert's proposal was sabotaged by rumor, innuendo and probably a little ignorance. I suspect that more of the same is spreading now, enabled by the way his case has been handled. If a tenured professor and 50 year veteran of DU teaching can be threatened in this way, then what chance do untenured colleagues, adjuncts, and other contingent faculty have if called to account for pushing the envelope in their classrooms? The outcome of this case, no matter which way it breaks, could easily determine whether teaching faculty will err on the side of risk-taking and boundary-crossing, or docility and conformity. Opting for the latter would be the death knell for innovative education at DU.

Sent: Saturday, May 08, 2010 7:04 AM
Fr: Dean Saitta [dsaitta@du.edu]
To: Socsci-chairs@du.edu
Cc: Sidra Wahaltere; Anne McCall; Susan Sterett
Re: Common Curriculum Proposal Review

Dear Fellow SOCS Chairs—

Because I still don't share with you an understanding of the specific "learning outcomes" criteria by which we're expected to evaluate course proposals for the SI2 [*Scientific Inquiry: Society and Culture*] curriculum I have no choice but to stay out of the review process. Yesterday's review of Art Gilbert's INTS 1510 proposal provided another good reason to stay away. All due respect, that was disgraceful, and disrespectful to Arthur as a faculty colleague. I gather that his course was rejected because he doesn't clearly identify as a social scientist, doesn't assign written work, shows too many movies in class, and doesn't enjoy the endorsement of either [*department name deleted*] or [*department name deleted*]. Perhaps the "warning label" that's been proposed for the Registrar's listing of his course also had something to do with it (which raises a question about why warning labels for courses is on anyone's radar screen in the first place, but apparently that's of no interest to us).

The most important of the concerns about Arthur's proposal—the ones relating to actual course content and requirements—are unsubstantiated. We also ignore the fact that Arthur has taught 12 sections of SOCS courses over the last 5 years and received student evaluations (for what they are worth) at or above SOCS averages in 5 of 7 categories including "Instructor" and "Course". The biggest irony, however, is that the "course outcomes" section of Art's proposal—which suggests an interest in exploring the evolved cultural and bio-psychological constraints on human behavior (especially power relations and warfare) that operate across time and space—hits WAY closer to the targeted SI2 learning outcomes (as I understand them) than those [*department name deleted*] proposals we approved last week.

SOCS faculty voted for a learning outcomes-based approach to evaluating course proposals for the Common Curriculum, one that would even-handedly consider proposals coming from faculty outside the Division and outside the social sciences. It seems to me that those values are not being honored in practice.

Dean

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