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AAUP PRINCIPLES CHALLENGED IN UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA SYSTEM

The Association's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure encourages the distribution of the following statement by the chair of its Subcommittee on Program Closings. The statement is not a determination of fact by the Association or the result of a Committee A investigation. As such, it should not be understood to predetermine, or to have any other dispositive effect on any future investigations or actions to be undertaken by Committee A or by the Association as a whole.

As chair of the Committee A Subcommittee on Program Closings, I am deeply disturbed by reports that the University of Louisiana System has embarked on what appears to be an unprecedented and unwarranted assault on its faculty. In 2010, Southeastern Louisiana University discontinued its undergraduate major in French, dismissing its three tenured professors with a year's notice. This alone would draw the attention of the subcommittee, insofar as no reason was given for the decision, and the French program was not underenrolled in comparison to majors such as Spanish; but we are especially alarmed by SLU's subsequent action, in which the administration proceeded to offer a temporary instructorship to one of the tenured professors it had just fired.

This year, the AAUP has learned that the University of Louisiana at Monroe is planning to do the same, or slightly worse, to its four tenured professors of Chemistry: dismiss them with six months' notice, then offer to re-hire them at the rank of instructor without tenure. We believe we do not have to wait to hear a third report from the UL system before concluding that we see an emerging pattern.

Both the SLU French department and the ULM Chemistry department perform vital services for their institutions; SLU is located in a parish and a state that is officially English-French bilingual, and ULM is known particularly for its pharmacy and health-care programs. Both programs have sufficient enrollment to justify the size of their faculty, as evidenced by the fact that they are able to rehire their fired professors in order to teach scheduled classes: SLU, for example, is offering twelve French courses next fall. It is simply refusing to staff them with its own tenured professors.

These practices violate so many AAUP principles that it is hard to know where to begin. But we should probably start by remarking that if senior professors with tenure can be fired and then immediately offered employment as short-term instructors, then tenure is essentially meaningless in the University of Louisiana System. There is no evidence that these decisions at SLU and ULM involved faculty consultation, or that they "reflect long-range judgments that the educational mission of the institution as a whole will be enhanced by the discontinuance," in violation of Recommended Institutional Regulation 4d (1) on program closure absent a declaration of financial exigency. There

was no attempt to place the faculty members “in another suitable position,” as required by RIR 4d (2); we do not regard a position as “suitable” when it involves the loss of tenure and a 50 percent cut in pay, as would be the case for one of the SLU French professors (a person only three years from retirement). Finally, we note that throughout the UL System, non-tenure-track faculty can be released on thirty days’ notice regardless of their length of service to their institutions– a policy that violates RIR 13 on the nonrenewal of contingent faculty.

The Committee A subcommittee acknowledges that many institutions are facing financial hardship, and will have to make difficult and painful decisions. The University of Louisiana System, however, appears to be going well beyond anything that can be justified by economic hardship, launching a capricious assault on tenure as well as minimal standards of job security for the untenured. Faculty nationwide should be advised that the UL System has effectively nullified its tenure procedures; and students in the UL System, and their parents, should be advised that maintaining the quality of core liberal arts programs is no longer a priority of the UL System administration.

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