



ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND TENURE: NUNEZ COMMUNITY COLLEGE (LOUISIANA)

The report of the investigating committee concerns the administration's action to terminate the services of an associate professor of English following his twenty-second year on the faculty. The investigating committee concluded that the action was taken in violation of the faculty member's academic freedom to speak on institutional matters without fear of reprisal. The investigating committee further concluded that the administration had not afforded him the dismissal hearing to which he was entitled as the result of having obtained de facto tenure at the institution through length of service. Nunez Community College does not have a formal tenure system.

The decision to terminate the professor's services followed his disagreement with the administration over the veracity of information to be provided to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACS), the college's regional accreditor. An accreditation visit in 2017 had cited the institution for failing to document "student success." Shortly after the arrival of a new chancellor in 2018, the administration found itself under pressure to complete monitoring reports for submission to the accreditor.

As general studies program manager, the professor was responsible for the completion of reports on the program. When he expressed concern that reports he had produced were not being included in the material to be submitted to SACS, the administration relieved him of his role. When he learned that the administration was submitting reports not prepared by him to SACS under his name, he requested that his name be removed. The administration denied his request.

The chancellor subsequently informed the faculty member that his services would be terminated, first in a phone call, in which the chancellor stated that he was "not a good fit" at the institution, and subsequently in a letter, in which she declined to provide reasons for the decision, pointing instead to the faculty member's status as an "at-will employee." In response to the professor's written appeal, the chancellor wrote, "[The decision] is not a reflection of your work record or behavior. Nor does it diminish the past contributions you have made to the college. Your time and service to the college is appreciated."

The report states, "In the absence of any stated cause for the administration's actions and on the basis of the available information, the investigating committee is left to conclude that the termination of [the faculty member's] services was a retaliatory measure taken in violation of his academic freedom."

Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure recommends to the 105th annual meeting that Nunez Community College be added to the Association's list of censured administrations.