



June 17, 2017

AAUP Removes Two from Academic Freedom Censure List, Adds Two

U of Illinois and Phillips Community College Removed from Censure List; Spalding U and Community College of Aurora Added

Washington, D.C. – Delegates to the 103rd annual meeting of the American Association of University Professors voted today to remove the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign and Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas from the AAUP’s list of administrations censured for violating principles and standards of academic freedom. The vote recognized that both institutions had successfully amended problematic policies and addressed the conditions that had brought about the original censure. Delegates also voted to impose censure on Spalding University (Kentucky) and the Community College of Aurora (Colorado), based on investigations conducted this year that revealed serious departures from principles and standards of academic freedom at those institutions.

[Censure](#) by the AAUP informs the public as well as the academic community that the administration of an institution has not adhered to the generally recognized principles of academic freedom and tenure jointly formulated in 1940 by the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges and Universities and endorsed by more than 250 professional and educational organizations. As of today, fifty-six institutions remain on the censure list. Each year the AAUP works with colleges and universities across the country to resolve outstanding issues and to see to the adoption of policies that better protect academic freedom. Academic freedom, which includes faculty members’ ability to conduct research and teach, serves a critical role in a functioning democratic society.

Censure Removals

In 2015, the AAUP found that the administration of the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign violated basic tenets of academic freedom when it revoked the tenured appointment of Steven Salaita because of his controversial Twitter posts about the war in Gaza. In fall 2015, Salaita, who had filed suit in federal district court, reached a financial settlement with the university. After negotiations with the AAUP, UIUC then made policy changes that addressed the issues that gave rise to the investigation. [More about report.](#) [Recommendations to the annual meeting on removal.](#)

Phillips Community College (Arkansas) has been on the AAUP’s censure list since 1978. The case that led to the censure involved the dismissal of a faculty member with ten years of full-time service. The faculty member’s case having been resolved years ago, recent negotiations

between the Phillips administration and the AAUP led to the college's adoption of a policy assuring that faculty members with more than six years of full-time service would be retained indefinitely unless the administration demonstrated cause for termination in a faculty hearing. In March, an AAUP visitor reported that the climate for academic freedom at the institution was "healthy." The University of Arkansas system president Donald R. Bobbitt said, "I express my sincere appreciation to the AAUP and the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure for reviewing and removing the censure on Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas. The isolated episode that led to the censure occurred very long ago and well before the college joined the UA System. We look forward to the college continuing to carry out its vital mission providing educational and economic development opportunities in the communities it serves." [Report details](#). [Recommendations to the annual meeting on removal](#).

Impositions of Censure

The administration of the Community College of Aurora abruptly dismissed Nathaniel Bork, a part-time philosophy instructor, without affording him any due-process rights and in apparent violation of his academic freedom. Despite six years of positive student evaluations, Bork faced the termination of his appointment after he drafted a letter to the Higher Learning Commission, the institution's regional accrediting agency, stating that the college was shortchanging students by lowering standards in order to improve course completion rates. The investigating committee concluded that the administration's action violated AAUP-recommended due-process standards for part-time faculty. [More about report](#). [Recommendations to the annual meeting on censure](#).

Erlene Grise-Owens, a tenured professor of social work with eighteen years of service at Spalding University, was summarily dismissed after she criticized the administration's handling of a report of an armed student who had a history of making inflammatory and racially charged comments in class, which included the use of racial epithets. The social work school's chair immediately alerted social work faculty about the incident—except the school's three faculty members of color, even though the student was scheduled to attend class with one of them the next day. The investigating committee found that the Spalding administration violated Grise-Owens's academic freedom in dismissing her and that the future of academic governance there "is bleak." Grise-Owens said, "I am grateful for the investigation's ensuring accountability and shining light on the university's administration and culture. I hope this intervention will inform and impact both this particular university and broader academia." [More about report](#). [Recommendations to the annual meeting on censure](#).