



June 16, 2018

AAUP Adds University of Nebraska–Lincoln to Censure List For Violations of Principles

Washington, D.C. – Delegates to the 104th Annual Meeting of the AAUP voted today to add the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) to the AAUP’s list of administrations censured for failing to observe generally recognized principles of academic freedom and tenure. An AAUP investigation found that UNL may have violated principles of academic freedom in suspending and failing to reinstate Ms. Courtney Lawton from her teaching responsibilities. Lawton, a sixth-year doctoral student with a part-time appointment during the 2017–18 academic year as lecturer, was suspended from teaching for the remainder of the academic year following her protest of an on-campus recruitment table for Turning Point USA. The vote to add the university to the censure list was based on the recommendation of the AAUP’s Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which concluded that UNL in its actions against Ms. Lawton made serious departures from AAUP’s principles and standards of academic freedom. An AAUP investigating committee found that political pressure on the university was “in some sense...at the very heart of [the case]” and that “[t]he conclusion seems inescapable that the basis for [Lawton’s] dismissal was related to the political content of her speech and thus may have violated her academic freedom.”

Lawton’s protest on August 25, 2017, was recorded and widely disseminated online, generating significant attention, which led to threats against her and the university. The administration initially removed the lecturer from her teaching responsibilities allegedly for her safety, but later refused to reinstate her, even in the subsequent semester, thus extending this suspension to the end of her term of appointment.

Although the administration took the position that the action taken against the lecturer was neither a suspension nor a dismissal, the AAUP’s investigation noted that an op-ed article by UNL chancellor Ronnie Green stated that “[Lawton] will not teach at our university going forward because of [her] inappropriate behavior” leaving little doubt as to the nature of her suspension of teaching duties. The AAUP considers an action to separate a faculty member from ongoing academic responsibilities prior to demonstration of stated cause in an appropriate proceeding to be a suspension, and it regards a suspension that is not followed by either reinstatement or the opportunity for a hearing to be a summary dismissal in violation of academic due process. Thus, the investigating committee deemed the action of the UNL administration to be tantamount to a summary dismissal, since the administration did not provide suitable due process before relieving Lawton of her role.

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, 56 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.

Read AAUP's [investigative report on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln case and the recommendation to the annual meeting that censure be imposed.](#)