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AAUP Will Investigate Apparent Violations at Maricopa

Washington, DC—The AAUP has appointed an ad hoc committee to formally investigate apparent departures from widely adopted standards of academic governance at Maricopa County Community College. The matter stems from a February resolution of the college’s governing board that terminated a “meet-and-confer” provision of the faculty policy manual and ordered the creation of a new manual that would severely limit the participation of the faculty in institutional governance. The “meet-and-confer” process had been implemented as a way for faculty and administrators to come to agreement on changes pertaining to “responsibilities, wages, governance, benefits, and all other terms and conditions of Residential Faculty employment.”

As the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, jointly formulated by the AAUP with the American Council on Education and the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, observes, “The structure and procedures for faculty participation should be designed, approved, and established by joint action of the components of the institution.” Therefore, significant changes to the structure and procedures for faculty participation in institutional governance should not be made unilaterally. The governing board’s termination of the “meet-and-confer” provision effectively eliminated the role of its representative faculty body in the process of making changes to the policy manual and thus unilaterally modified the structure and procedure for faculty participation in institutional governance.

Of particular concern is the governing board’s directive that the new manual, to be prepared unilaterally by the administration, may not allow faculty to participate in matters related to “compensation, benefits, accountability, and organizational operations.” Not only would such a change modify the structure and procedure for faculty participation, the resulting changes would themselves be at odds with principles of academic governance, which call for meaningful faculty participation in decisions that affect all of these areas.

In addition the committee will investigate concerns related to potential incursions upon academic freedom involving a directive from Provost Karla Fisher. Following the adoption of the governing board’s resolution, Fisher wrote to the college presidents to inform them that “Senate Presidents and Representatives must be dutiful in avoiding any . . . Faculty Association-related work or conversations during business hours.” The provost’s directive appears to circumscribe the academic freedom of faculty members to express their views on matters having to do with their institution and its policies.

AAUP investigating committees are appointed in a few select cases annually in which severe departures from widely accepted principles and standards on academic freedom, tenure, or governance have been alleged and persist despite efforts to resolve them. Investigating committees are composed of faculty members from other institutions with no previous involvement in the matter. If the investigating committee's published report finds that serious violations have occurred and an appropriate resolution cannot be achieved, the AAUP may place an institution on its censure or sanction list, which informs the academic community and the public that conditions for academic freedom or shared governance at the institution are unsound.