

February 13, 2023

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND TENURE: INDIANA UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST

The investigating committee's report concerns the summary suspension and subsequent summary dismissal of a tenured professor of communication who had previously served as the institution's chief academic officer.

In August 2021, the faculty member's dean and executive vice chancellor of academic affairs—both of whom were named in an equal employment opportunity complaint the professor had filed the previous year—suspended him from his teaching duties for the upcoming semester and reduced his salary by 75 percent, alleging that his teaching was deficient and that he had tried to “shift blame” for his shortcomings to his students.

In September 2021, the administration dispatched campus police officers to the faculty member's home to inform him that he had been dismissed and banned from campus, supposedly for making racially charged threats of physical violence in response to the suspension, including “words to the effect that ‘the only way to end racism is to kill all the white people.’” No accuser was identified, and no criminal charges were filed.

Denied a faculty hearing in which the burden of proof would have rested with the administration, as required under AAUP-recommended standards, the faculty member was compelled to appeal the actions to a faculty grievance committee. In his appeal, he argued that institutional authorities had retaliated against him for criticizing the administration's handling of racial equity issues and for filing equal opportunity complaints against the two administrators responsible for suspending and dismissing him. Even though the faculty member was obliged to bear the burden of proof, the grievance committee determined that both his suspension and his dismissal were unwarranted. The administration rejected the committee's findings and recommendations.

The AAUP investigating committee found that the administration's summary actions to suspend and dismiss the professor disregarded AAUP-supported standards of academic due process as well as the institution's own dismissal policy.

While deeming implausible the charge that the faculty member had made violent threats, the committee found “highly credible” his allegation that the

administration had retaliated against him for his intramural speech and therefore violated his academic freedom.

The committee further concluded that conditions for academic governance at the institution are unsound and its racial climate is unwelcoming to faculty members of color. With respect to that climate, the committee noted that the subject faculty member had regularly highlighted racial inequity on the IUN campus and that the criticisms and charges against him employed racial stereotypes of Black men as incompetent, angry, and violent.

Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure recommends to the AAUP's governing Council that Indiana University Northwest be added to the Association's list of censured administrations.