

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

The report of the investigating committee concerns the process leading to the action of Illinois Wesleyan University's board of trustees, in July 2020, to discontinue programs in anthropology, French, Italian, and religious studies and to issue notice of appointment terminations to nine tenured faculty members in those programs. In taking this action, the governing board and the administration claimed to have adhered to Regulation 4d, "Discontinuance of Program or Department for Educational Reasons," of the AAUP's *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. The IWU faculty, however, informed the Association's staff that the process of program review was marred by repeated departures on the part of the administration and governing board, not only from Regulation 4d but also from AAUP-supported standards of academic governance—departures which the faculty had formally protested, to no avail, on numerous occasions. Chief among the faculty's complaints were that the administratively initiated process did not employ existing faculty governance bodies and procedures; that the faculty's participation was based on the administration's assurance that the process would not eventuate in the termination of tenured appointments; that rather than educational considerations guiding the process, as the board and administration had initially stated, financial considerations ended up being paramount; that the governing board rejected the faculty's final recommendations on program reductions and closures and substituted its own, without providing the faculty with a compelling explanation for doing so; and that the administration, despite having invoked Regulation 4d, failed to make "every effort," as that regulation requires, to find another suitable position within the institution for the one affected faculty member whose situation remained unresolved.

While acknowledging the complexity of the challenges confronting the IWU administration and board, the investigating committee found that, in taking unilateral action to discontinue four academic programs and terminate nine tenured appointments, they had departed from AAUP-recommended principles and standards. In disregard of the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, the committee specifically found, the administration and governing board failed to engage in adequate communication regarding the possibility that the program review might result in appointment terminations; failed to honor existing provisions in the faculty handbook designed to preserve the faculty's "primary responsibility" for curricular decision-making; imposed their own program-review process; and declined to provide "compelling reasons stated in detail" for rejecting the final curricular recommendations of the committee they had created.

On April 24, the IWU faculty hearing panel considering the grievance of the single remaining displaced faculty member issued a report sustaining the faculty member's allegations that (a) the administration and governing board did not follow faculty handbook procedures in discontinuing his department and (b) the administration did not make every effort to find him another suitable position within the institution. The hearing panel's report has gone to the board of trustees for final disposition. According to the faculty handbook, "Acceptance of the Hearing Panel's recommendation would normally be expected."

In view of this pending action, the Committee on College and University Governance will delay until fall 2021 its consideration of whether to recommend to the AAUP's governing Council that Illinois Wesleyan University be added to the Association's list of institutions sanctioned for substantial non-compliance with standards of academic government.