



Approved by Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure on June 2, 2018.

Academic Freedom and Tenure: University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The report of the investigating committee concerns the administration's action to suspend from her teaching responsibilities a sixth-year doctoral student with a part-time appointment as lecturer for the entire academic year. At the beginning of the fall semester, the lecturer had protested an on-campus recruitment table for Turning Point USA (TPUSA), a conservative organization that opposes what it views as the liberal agenda in US higher education. TPUSA maintains the Professor Watchlist website. Her protest, which was video recorded by the undergraduate student staffing the table and widely disseminated online, generated significant attention, leading to threats against her and the university. The administration initially removed the lecturer from her teaching responsibilities, allegedly for her safety, but then refused to reinstate her, even in the subsequent semester, thus extending this suspension to the end of her term of appointment.

Under AAUP-supported standards, an action to separate a faculty member from ongoing academic responsibilities prior to demonstration of stated cause in an appropriate proceeding is deemed a suspension, and a suspension that is not followed by either reinstatement or the opportunity for a hearing is considered a summary dismissal in violation of academic due process. The AAUP does not regard continuation of salary as having any bearing on these positions. Although the administration took the position that the action taken against the lecturer was neither a suspension nor a dismissal, the chancellor's announcement "that she will not teach at our university going forward because of [her] inappropriate behavior" left little doubt as to its actual nature. Thus, the investigating committee deemed the action of the UNL administration to be tantamount to a summary dismissal. Although the administration offered the lecturer a grievance process to contest that its action was tantamount to dismissal, it refused to afford her a hearing on the substantive grounds for her dismissal.

The committee found that political pressure on the university was "in some sense...at the very heart of [the case]." State legislators maintained that her conduct toward the student staffing the recruitment table was representative of a campus climate hostile to conservative views and called for her dismissal, and the Nebraska Republican Party filed open records requests for e-

mail correspondence related to the case. The investigating committee's report states that "[t]he conclusion seems inescapable that the basis for [the lecturer's] dismissal was related to the political content of her speech and thus may have violated her academic freedom, a conclusion that stands unrebutted absent the affordance of a dismissal hearing."

Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure recommends to the 104th annual meeting that the University of Nebraska–Lincoln be added to the Association's list of censured administrations.