

May 30, 2015

The University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign

The report of the investigating subcommittee concerns the actions taken by the University of Illinois administration to reject the appointment of Professor Steven Salaita. In October 2013, Professor Salaita was offered a tenured position in the American Indian Studies Program at UIUC, effective in August with the start of the fall 2014 semester. He accepted the offer, received course assignments, and resigned from his tenured position at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Professor Salaita's posts in late summer 2014 on the social media site Twitter expressed outrage in strong language over the war in Gaza. After these posts were brought to the attention of the UIUC administration, Chancellor Phyllis Wise informed him on August 1 that his appointment would not be submitted to the board for approval. His appointment, like all tenured appointments, had been defined in the administration's offer as subject to final approval by the board of trustees, but the appointee and those who recruited him had reason to believe that board approval was a mere formality, mainly because the board's meeting was scheduled for September 25, more than two weeks after the fall term began. Subsequently, the chancellor did submit the appointment to the board, which voted in September to reject it.

The Association has consistently held that aborting an appointment without having demonstrated cause is tantamount to summary dismissal, an action categorically inimical to academic due process. As the stated reasons for Professor Salaita's dismissal were his Twitter posts, the administration was obligated under AAUP-supported standards to demonstrate that these extramural utterances clearly implicated his professional fitness as a faculty member. Instead, the chancellor and trustees justified the dismissal by insisting that "civility" was a standard by which to judge the fitness of a scholar and teacher. They further maintained that incivility threatened the comfort and security of students. The trustees claimed that disrespectful and demeaning speech "is not an acceptable form of civil argument" and "has no place . . . in our democracy." In rejecting Professor Salaita's appointment after it had already begun, the board chair did express interest in compensating him for the damage done to his pocketbook and to his academic career.

The investigating subcommittee concluded that the rejection of the Salaita appointment for the reasons stated by the chancellor and the board violated Professor Salaita's academic freedom and cast a pall of uncertainty over the

degree to which academic freedom is understood and respected at UIUC. The subcommittee further concluded that the chancellor in her rejection of the Salaita appointment contravened AAUP's widely accepted standards for the conduct of academic governance.

Responding to an invitation to provide information on subsequent developments at UIUC of which Committee A should be aware when it formulates a statement on the Salaita case for presentation to the 2015 annual meeting, the administration informed the committee of efforts to improve institutional policies and practices, which in the judgment of Committee A have not adequately addressed the issues raised in the investigative report. We will continue to monitor developments in this regard.

Chancellor Wise has reported that "genuine and significant" efforts have been made to reach a settlement with Professor Salaita. Professor Salaita's attorneys dispute this. Whatever the outcome of the litigation, the Association's concern is not with whether an administration's actions have been legal but rather with whether they conform to sound academic practice as established in AAUP principles, principles that UIUC has itself endorsed.

Committee A therefore recommends to the One Hundred and First Annual Meeting that the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign be placed on the Association's list of censured administrations.