

June 6, 2014

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

The December 2012 report of the investigating committee recounted unilateral actions taken in February and March 2012 by the administration of the University of Northern Iowa to discontinue nearly 20 percent of the university's academic programs. In carrying out these program closures, the administration threatened to terminate more than fifty faculty appointments. Although the terminations did not occur, a number of faculty members, including several on tenure, accepted retirement offers in the belief that refusing to do so would result in the immediate termination of their appointments with no severance salary.

The investigating committee concluded that the administration had defined program areas for elimination solely for the purpose of laying off faculty members it no longer wished to retain, that many of the retirements accepted as alternatives to layoff were in fact cases of constructive discharge in which the administration terminated tenured appointments without having demonstrated its grounds for so doing, and that these actions violated standards set forth in the joint 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* and Regulations 4c and 4d of the Association's derivative *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. The committee also found that the administration's actions violated principles articulated in the AAUP's *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities* as well as the university's own policies.

In June 2013, a new president took office. In the months preceding his appointment, he engaged the faculty union (UNI-United Faculty, an AAUP chapter), the faculty senate, and the AAUP's staff in discussions aimed at addressing the issues raised in the investigating committee's report. Following these discussions, UNI faculty leaders, including the AAUP chapter president, informed the AAUP's staff of improvements in academic governance and urged that any action regarding censure be deferred to allow more time to address the investigating committee's concerns. In the meantime, the AAUP chapter and the Iowa board of regents had reached a settlement in the cases of the faculty members who had been constructively discharged.

As a result of these developments, Committee A made no recommendation regarding the University of Northern Iowa to last year's annual meeting. Instead, it stated that it would retain the matter on its agenda and report back to this year's meeting.

In May 2014, letters responding to a staff request for updates came from key faculty groups and the administration. The chair of the UNI faculty outlined efforts the new president had made to improve communication between the faculty and the administration and noted the “greatly improved relationship” between the faculty and the Iowa board of regents. In closing, he thanked the AAUP, on behalf of the UNI faculty, for its assistance during the past three years and for helping to “move things in a positive direction.” The chair of the university faculty senate cited increased faculty control of the curriculum (with further progress expected) and increased faculty involvement in budgetary decision making (again, with further progress expected) in addition to improved communication. He stated that he and his fellow faculty leaders have found the new administration to be “transparent, open-door, and supportive of innovation.”

The president of the AAUP chapter reported that the administration has been meeting productively with UNI-United Faculty to address the issue of program definition in times of financial stress, that the cases of individual faculty members affected by the threatened layoffs have been resolved through cooperative efforts, that additional outstanding issues have been addressed, and that new channels of communication between the president and the chapter have resulted in several promising joint initiatives, including discussions of interest-based bargaining with the board of regents. He closed by stating that by working cooperatively, the administration and UNI-United Faculty “have made significant progress in restoring respect for academic freedom, tenure, and faculty governance at the University of Northern Iowa.”

The UNI president informed the staff that, after assessing the challenges the university faced upon his taking office, his administration had made a commitment to “communication, collaboration, and service.” He cited specific steps taken to increase faculty involvement in all areas of institutional decision making, including making structural changes to key governance bodies, and to address other issues raised in the investigating committee’s report. He thanked the AAUP’s leadership for its “support and assistance” over the past year in helping the university “move forward with AAUP as a partner in the educational process.”

In view of these many favorable developments, Committee A is pleased to close its file on the University of Northern Iowa investigation.