

# Report: Iowa Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure

by Heimir Geirsson

According to its Constitution, the AAUP's central mission is "to advance the standards, ideals, and welfare of the profession" (*Constitution of the Association*, Article I). Since its founding in 1915, the AAUP's chief instrument for carrying out this mission has been its first standing committee—Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

Although the committee's chief function has always been to develop standard policies and procedures for incorporation into faculty handbooks and to monitor institutional compliance with these standards, the committee for many years has also provided advice and counsel to faculty members who call or write seeking assistance in matters of academic freedom, tenure, and due process. This assistance is provided by members of AAUP's national staff assigned to Committee A and is available to all, regardless of whether or not a complainant is a member of the AAUP.

This latter function of national Committee A is also carried on by state conferences and local chapters, a necessity given the thousands of faculty who experience such problems annually and the small number (five) of the already overburdened national staff officers who handle such complaints.

Thus, the Iowa Conference, like most state conferences, has created its own Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which, in fulfilling its task, works closely with the national Committee A staff, often referring the most serious complaints directly to them.

To give Iowa AAUP members a more concrete idea of our committee's work, I offer the following report of our eleven contacts in the past twelve months. (To protect the privacy of the individuals involved, these accounts have been heavily redacted.)

1. A tenured faculty member complained that the administration was attempting to renege on elements of its contract with him and, as a consequence, had deleted clauses in his written contract with correction fluid. Consultation with national staff made it evident that the critical

issues involved were legal, not professional, and that the professor should seek legal assistance.

2. An untenured faculty member said that he had been forced to stand for tenure upon short notice and earlier than two colleagues whose date of initial appointment was the same as his. Since his tenure evaluation was already well underway, he was advised to wait for the result before taking action. Among the complex additional issues about which the professor sought advice were several that seemed to lie beyond AAUP's appropriate purview. In an effort to disentangle these issues, we consulted with national AAUP staff. But before we could provide further assistance, the professor had left the country.

3. A tenured faculty member sought the committee's assistance because she was concerned about her chair's report to the dean following her post-tenure review. She viewed the chair's letter as unduly harsh and an improper characterization of the generally favorable report sent to the chair by the post-tenure review committee. We counseled her about her dealings with the chair and dean, and the availability of the grievance procedures.

4. An untenured faculty member contacted the committee a few months before her tenure decision. She was concerned about possibly hostile responses to her by the chair of the tenure committee. We counseled her about dealing with that person and advised her to take the issue up with the chair, if the hostile behavior continued. The faculty member eventually received tenure with no problems.

5. An untenured faculty member asked for help in the process of responding to the dean following a negative tenure recommendation from her chair. Her department had voted unanimously in her favor. The point of contention was the quantity of her scholarship, particularly the status of a book manuscript. As of the date of consultation, she had a contract from the publisher, subject only to final revi-

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## Need Help?

The colleagues whose names, addresses, and phone numbers appear in the box above are prepared to assist you. Don't hesitate to contact one of them if you encounter problems related to your academic freedom or rights to due process.

Send letters/submissions to  
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## From the president: achieving greatness

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a passing interest and commitment to a discipline and to the profession.

Great universities therefore respect the work of the faculty and are committed to providing a nurturing, fair, collaborative, and ethical environment for teaching, scholarship, and service. An administration that does not foster shared governance only serves to alienate faculty members and to underemploy their talents. Such decision-making is at variance with the role of the university to provide the best possible education for students and to create knowledge for society. It is also expensive, because after many years of bad decisions, the institution may find itself struggling to

recruit and retain highly qualified faculty members, to the detriment of the overall quality of the education provided.

Academic institutions are entitled to leadership that not only supports faculty efforts in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service but includes the faculty in planning at all levels. Hopefully, as we make the public aware of the role of faculty and the AAUP in helping governing boards develop outstanding colleges and universities, faculty will be accorded full participation in the long-term decision-making processes of their institutions.

Best wishes for success in all your efforts to improve educational quality at your institution.

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sions. We assisted in the drafting of her letter to the dean.

6. A senior faculty member, following a lengthy dry spell in terms of published scholarship, was told by his chair that the only way for him to receive pay raises was to do extra teaching. We advised him about approaching his dean and demonstrating that discrimination against him from the chair, both in relation to the nature of his scholarship and to his salary, pre-dates the dry period.

7. An unsuccessful tenure candidate was appealing a negative tenure decision. He had been denied following the dean's negative recommendation, despite a unanimous positive vote from the department. We advised him and assisted in drafting his appeal letter.

8. An unsuccessful tenure candidate sought the help of the committee in filing an appeal. He had received negative recommendations from both the dean and the department chair and a split vote from the department. We assisted him in framing his arguments and in drafting his letter.

9. An unsuccessful tenure candidate, who had received negative recommendations from the tenure committee, from the VPAA, and from the

president sought assistance in pursuing an appeal. We reviewed the draft appeal document and offered advice for revisions. A member of Committee A also accompanied the faculty member to his meeting with the appeals committee. The appeal was unsuccessful.

10. An unsuccessful tenure candidate who had received a positive recommendation for tenure from the department as well as a favorable vote from the tenure committee was denied tenure by the administration. We assisted in the filing of an appeal and in seeking legal counsel.

A member of Committee A also accompanied the professor to two appeal hearings. Although the appeals committee recommended against reconsideration, the faculty member was later granted tenure by the administration.

11. A tenured professor contacted Iowa Committee A when it appeared that his administration intended to initiate dismissal proceedings against him for reasons that the professor claimed were related to his disability. After consulting with national AAUP staff, we advised the faculty member to seek legal counsel. The professor accordingly retained an attorney with whose help he has managed so far to avoid any additional serious adverse actions.

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## Iowa AAUP website

Point your browser to  
<<http://www.aapiowa.org/>>  
for Iowa AAUP information, back issues of *Iowa Academe*, and links to AAUP websites around the country.