

# AAUP

American Association of University Professors

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*Academic Freedom for a Free Society*

VIA FACSIMILE (225-578-6400)

April 5, 2010

Dr. Michael V. Martin  
Chancellor  
Louisiana State University  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803

Dear Chancellor Martin:

We regret that you have declined thus far to respond to the letters we have written to your office setting forth our Association's concerns relating to the action taken by the Louisiana State University administration to terminate the services of Professor Ivor van Heerden. Our Association's general secretary, after reviewing the information available to us on his case, and after conferring with members of the Association's staff, has reached the conclusion that this matter raises significant issues of academic freedom, tenure, and due process. In situations of this kind, which present developments of basic concern to the academic community, our experience has indicated that it is desirable, in fairness to the institutional administration, to the affected faculty member, and to the institution as a whole, to establish an *ad hoc* committee composed of persons who have had no previous involvement with the particular matter, to conduct its own full inquiry without prejudgment of any kind. The general secretary has therefore authorized the appointment of such a committee to investigate the case of Professor van Heerden.

In accordance with our customary procedures, the *ad hoc* committee will be selected by the Association from among members of the academic profession of recognized standing. It will visit Louisiana State University at the mutual convenience of the committee and the institution. It will be specifically charged with consulting in full measure with you, and with such members of the faculty and the administration as may be designated, in order to ensure that the university will have a complete opportunity to present its position. The *ad hoc* committee will prepare a report for the consideration of the Association's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure, which may authorize its publication. The *ad hoc* committee will be instructed not to release on its own account any substantive information to the press. Under Association procedures, prior to any publication a draft text is submitted on a confidential basis to the institution's chief administrative officer and to others principally concerned in the report, with an invitation to them to offer corrections of any factual errors and whatever other comments they deem suitable.

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In addition to its charge relating to the van Heerden case, the *ad hoc* committee may be asked to address another case at Louisiana State University if it remains unresolved. The case, which just recently came to our attention, involves Dr. Dominique G. Homberger, a tenured professor in the Department of Biological Sciences. She reports having been summarily removed from teaching a course after complaints about the distribution of grades she had assigned in that course—grades that were changed by someone else after a new instructor took over the class. This Association has consistently viewed an instructor's authority in assigning particular grades to be a direct corollary of the "freedom in the classroom" ensured by the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*.

We shall be writing again to inform you of the names of the members of the *ad hoc* committee and the proposed dates for the committee's visit. We should like at this time to emphasize the Association's receptivity in these cases, as in all others, to a resolution that would preclude the necessity for the investigation now authorized.

Sincerely,



B. Robert Kreiser  
Associate Secretary

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cc: Dr. Astrid Merget, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost  
Dr. Richard J. Koubek, Dean, College of Engineering  
Professor George Z. Voyiadjis, Chair, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering  
Professor Kevin Cope, President, Faculty Senate  
Professor Pratul Ajmera, Chair, Senate Faculty Grievance Committee  
Professor Brooks B. Elwood, Interim President, AAUP Chapter  
Professor Ivor van Heerden  
Dr. Kevin R. Carman, Dean, College of Basic Sciences  
Professor Marcia Newcomer, Chair, Department of Biological Sciences  
Professor Dominique Homberger  
Professor Alvin Burstein, President, AAUP Louisiana Conference  
Professor Linda L. Carroll, Member, AAUP Governing Council, District IV