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601 Cumberland

March 10, 2009

Mr. Federico Carvajal
External Commission
Graduate Students' Association – University of Ottawa
Canadian Federation of Students – Local 94

Dear Mr. Carvajal:

Re: Suspension and Dean Lalonde's recommendation for dismissal of Prof. Denis Rancourt

I have been asked by the President to respond to your letter dated February 24, 2009, in which your Association protests the suspension and recommendation for dismissal of Professor Rancourt, which you qualify as "political" and threatening academic freedom.

You will understand that I am not at liberty to disclose the details of Professor Rancourt's employment with the University, particularly in the context where proceedings are pending with respect to the recommendation dealing with his dismissal.

However, Professor Rancourt has chosen to make public Dean Lalonde's letter recommending his dismissal. You will have noted that one of the grounds cited in support of the recommendation relates to Mr. Rancourt's assigning a grade of A+ to all students enrolled in his fourth year physics course and his master's level course. As there has been significant public debate regarding this aspect of this matter, I can share with you my observations regarding this practice in the context of the issues raised in your letter.

Your letter makes reference to concerns regarding academic freedom. Academic freedom includes both an individual aspect and a collective and collegial aspect. Indeed, one of the fundamental aspects of academic freedom is the ability to participate in, and the duty to respect, collegial decision-making at departmental and faculty levels in the establishment of academic regulations, such as grading. In my view, if the University elected to condone actions which represent a conscious disregard for collegial decision-making, it would risk the preservation of academic freedom.

Second, the University considers that one of the most fundamental duties of a professor involves treating all students with respect and supporting them in their quest for knowledge and excellence.

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Mr. Federico Carvajal
March 10, 2009

2

Giving the same mark to all students irrespective of the value of their work represents disrespect toward students. It also undermines their work insofar as it diminishes the respect or credibility which can be accorded to the marks which they have received.)

Finally, academic freedom cannot be sustained without the utmost respect and commitment to academic integrity and a rejection of academic fraud, whether perpetrated by a student or a professor. A violation of these tenets of academic freedom and academic integrity cannot go unchallenged.)

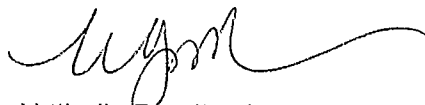
The University is also concerned that a practice of awarding a mark of A+ to all students could have a significant detrimental impact on our students, particularly at the graduate level. Our concerns include:

- the credibility of the academic achievement of the students registered to obtain a degree from the University of Ottawa;
- the fact that student grades are relied on for the awarding of scholarships and bursaries and admission to graduate programs; and
- the perception among other universities that the integrity of the University's academic results could not be trusted, with consequent damage to the reputation of our students.

It is indeed unfortunate that some students have refused to be referred to alternative supervisors in the context of the unavailability of Professor Rancourt as a supervisor. We would appreciate the support of your association in our attempt to find practical and respectful solutions for these students in this difficult context.)

I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Kindest regards,



Nathalie Des Rosiers
Vice-President, Governance and University Secretary



GRADUATE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION DES ÉTUDIANT(E)S DIPLÔMÉ(E)S

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February 24, 2009

Allan Rock, President
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario
550, Cumberland
Ottawa, ON
K1N 6N5

Re: Suspension and university plan to fire Professor Denis Rancourt

Dear Mr. Rock:

The Graduate Students' Association Étudiant(e)s Diplômé(e)s (GSAÉD), the collective voice for University of Ottawa graduate students, is writing to protest the University's actions against physics professor Denis Rancourt.

It is our view that the suspension and planned dismissal of Professor Rancourt are political in nature and threaten academic freedom in this institution. As such, the University's actions harm the campus intellectual environment for all graduate students, negatively affect the image of the University, and diminish the value of the school's graduate and professional degrees.

The GSAÉD stands for academic freedom, the freedom of professors and graduate students to be political, inside and outside of the classroom or laboratory, to design their collaborations, interactions and development, inside and outside of the classroom or laboratory, and to experiment with novel teaching, research, and learning methods, with education and advancement as primary goals.

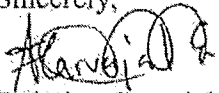
The matter of the political dismissal of Professor Rancourt is of great concern to the GSAÉD. The University's strong-arm tactics have already caused harm to those graduate students directly affected, as is the case with students being forced to switch supervisors and as a result to abandon their research topics. The University's actions are undermining our institution's credibility as an open place of research, discourse and learning.

The GSAÉD affirms the rights of graduate students to choose their research topics and their research supervisors without interference from the university administration. The proposed dismissal of Professor Rancourt is unrelated to his research or to his capacity as a research supervisor. As such, it is inadmissible that his graduate students are being immediately penalized with an unjustified suspension of the professor's graduate supervision duties.

The ultimate firing of Professor Rancourt under the untenable accusations that have been advanced by the University would constitute an unacceptable attack on academic freedom.

The GSAÉD asks that the University repair and mediate rather than continue its reckless campaign to neutralize a student supervisor and researcher. We wish to help mediate any solution that would reduce the harm to our members.

Sincerely,



Federico Carvajal

External Commissioner

Graduate Students' Association – University of Ottawa

Canadian Federation of Students – Local 94