

# AAUP of LSU

Louisiana State University Chapter  
American Association of University Professors  
Academic Freedom for a Free Society

President John V. Lombardi  
Louisiana State University System  
3810 West Lakeshore Drive  
Baton Rouge, LA 70808-4600

April 12, 2010

Subject: **Violation of Academic Freedom and Faculty Rights at LSU**

Dear President Lombardi,

During the Spring semester, 2010, Dr. Dominique Homberger was removed as instructor for General Biology (BIOL 1001 Sec. 4). This action was taken by the Dean of the College of Basic Sciences, and was based on the distribution of mid-term grades that she posted last month. There was no pre-suspension/removal consultation with Dr. Homberger by higher administrators, including the Chair of Biological Sciences, Dean of the College of Basic Sciences, Provost, or Chancellor, all of whom were aware of this action before it was taken. Subsequently, without her permission and while she was still an Instructor of Record for the course, her grades were changed. These actions are violations of fundamental, well-established faculty rights, specifically (1) academic freedom in the classroom, and (2) due process, as laid out in a number of documents that the university subscribes to, including PS 44, the *Faculty Handbook*, and AAUP guidelines for academic freedom and tenure as given in the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*.

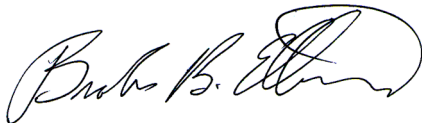
After Dr. Homberger's removal from the classroom and changing of her grades, she contacted the LSU Chapter of AAUP and verbally filed a grievance. The Executive Committee of the Chapter met and decided to investigate the matter. The President (myself), and Vice President, Dr. Irvin Peckham, were charged with contacting the Chair of Biological Sciences, Dr. Marcia Newcomer, the Dean of Basic Sciences, Dr. Kevin Carman, and the LSU Provost, Dr. Astrid Merget, to ask them the reasons for their actions in this matter. Both Drs. Newcomer and Carman agreed to meet Drs. Ellwood and Peckham. However, Dr. Merget declined as follows: "*LSU has clearly established policies and procedures for filing a grievance in such matters. It is our policy not to comment on personnel matters outside of established policy.*"

On the basis of comments and documentation provided by Drs. Newcomer, Carman, and Homberger, we reconstructed the following sequence of events. After Dr. Homberger submitted her mid-term grades, Dr. Newcomer was informed by Dr. E. William Wischusen, Associate Chair and Coordinator of Introductory Biology, that the mid-term grade distribution for that section was strongly skewed toward D's and F's. Dr. Newcomer was concerned how this might impact students, but *without discussion with Dr. Homberger*, Drs. Newcomer and Wischusen brought the issue to Dr. Carman. They made the decision to remove Dr. Homberger from the class. However, they decided to

wait until after Dr. Homberger had given the second of four scheduled tests, believing that that would be a good time for her removal. Drs. Newcomer and Carman chose not to wait until after the second test had been given to make their decision. Before this removal took place, Dr. Carman then contacted Academic Affairs and the Chancellor concerning his decision, and was given permission to proceed. He did not contact HRM until after Dr. Homberger had been suspended from teaching. Following Dr. Homberger's suspension, and while she was still an instructor of record, the grades on the first test were changed. This action was taken without her permission. Dr. Homberger was unaware of any of these decisions until after she was informed by Dr. Carman that she was being relieved from her teaching duties.

After careful deliberation, we feel strongly that the actions taken against Dr. Homberger were in fact an egregious violation of Dr. Homberger's rights, as a faculty member at LSU, to academic freedom in the classroom, and to due process. AAUP has outlined the possible grounds for removal of a faculty member from the classroom, and LSU adheres to those guidelines (elaborated in the Faculty Handbook and LSU policy statements PS 44 and PS 104). Given the violations presented here, we demand and expect apologies for these actions from Dr. Newcomer (to Dr. Homberger, AND to the entire faculty of Biological Sciences), from Dr. Carman (to Dr. Homberger AND to the entire faculty of the College of Basic Sciences), and from Dr. Merget (to Dr. Homberger AND to the entire LSU faculty), for a serious threat to our fundamental faculty right of academic freedom in the classroom. We also demand assurance from these individuals that academic freedom will be restored at LSU. In the absence of a satisfactory resolution of this issue, the LSU Chapter of AAUP will be forced to recommend to the national AAUP censure of the administration at LSU.

Very sincerely,



Brooks Ellwood  
President, LSU Chapter of AAUP

*Robey H. Clark Distinguished Professor in Geology  
Louisiana State University  
Department of Geology and Geophysics*

For the LSU Chapter of AAUP

cc: Dr. Michael Martin, LSU Chancellor  
Dr. Astrid Merget, LSU Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost  
Dr. Kevin Carman, LSU Dean of Basic Sciences  
Dr. Marcia Newcomer, LSU Chair of Biological Sciences  
Dr. Dominique Homberger, LSU Professor in Biological Sciences  
Dr. B. Robert Kreiser, Associate Secretary, AAUP