
REPORT FROM THE APA OMBUDSPERSON FOR NONDISCRIMINATION

SUBMITTED BY LAURIE SHRAGE

Below is my report for the past year regarding the complaints and inquiries I received as APA Ombuds for Nondiscrimination.

I received a copy of a lawsuit from a female full professor in philosophy at a public university. The suit alleges age and sex discrimination, and anti-Semitism. I encouraged her to send a copy of her complaint to the chair of the APA Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers, if she wants the APA to consider whether some action is appropriate. Her main complaint is salary discrimination. She also indicated that there were serious problems within her department, and that her dean has threatened to eliminate her department. I sent her some links to the APA website that contain letters to university presidents regarding similar threats to philosophy departments, and urged her to seek help from the APA if the Philosophy department and degree programs on her campus continue to be threatened with elimination.

One male assistant professor, who is not a U.S. citizen, contacted me about the termination of his tenure-track appointment. When he asked his department chair, dean, and provost to supply a reason for terminating his appointment and for not allowing him to apply for tenure, he was told that the administration is not required to show cause. He has initiated a lawsuit. I encouraged him to write to the chair of the APA Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers, and to contact the AAUP as well. He has contacted the AAUP and was told that they would not, at this time, take up his case. He also contacted the faculty union on his campus and, because he is not a member, they told him they could not provide him with support or advice. His lawsuit alleges discrimination on the basis of nationality, as well as the violation of his employment contract with the university. The APA Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers sent a letter of inquiry to the Provost, who responded that discussing the case would violate the privacy rights of the faculty member concerned. The faculty member sent his Provost his permission to discuss his termination with the APA, and the Committee chair followed up with another letter. I do not know if the Provost ever responded to the second letter.

A female assistant professor in a tenure-track position who contacted me last year about the nonrenewal of her contract has kept in touch,

updating me about the status of her various appeals. She has now exhausted all options within her university and is initiating a lawsuit. Her complaint has been forwarded to the chair of the APA Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers, the Committee on Inclusiveness, and the Committee on the Status of Women. Some students on her campus organized a rally on her behalf and she asked me if I could get someone representing the APA to speak at the rally. I told her that the organization and its officers did not typically do this sort of thing, and that various committees were reviewing her materials and would decide what actions, if any, the APA would take.

This summer, I attended a meeting of “The Essex Group” a non-APA professional organization that aims to increase the number of women in Philosophy, and improve the climate for women in the profession. At the Pacific APA last year, I attended a few sessions that addressed climate issues in Philosophy for women and persons of color. One thing that’s fair to say is that women and people of color in the profession, who are themselves quite successful, are not in agreement about what needs to be done to attract and support members of underrepresented groups. The controversy sparked this summer by “The Pluralists’ Guide” has created interesting divisions and debates among seemingly harmonious groups, and these issues should be aired and widely discussed in the profession (in a civil fashion), and not only among the “diversity committees.”

I appreciate the opportunity to serve the APA in this position for the past three years, and I know I am handing it off to someone who will handle the duties with care and insight.

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FOR THE PERIOD: JULY 1, 2011-SEPTEMBER 24, 2011

SUBMITTED BY CHESHIRE CALHOUN

There was one request for Ombudsperson investigation. Details are as follows.

Allegations were made, on the Women in Philosophy Task Force Listserv, which has a sizable readership, that the Palmer House Hilton’s meeting rooms were not all wheelchair accessible. The same person making those allegations also made a post claiming that David Schrader had improperly referred a request to consider the formation of a new APA committee on disability to the Inclusiveness Committee. An APA member who also participates on the WPhTF listserv requested that I investigate the first charge. I took it upon myself to respond to the second charge as well.

After conducting an independent investigation, I posted the following response to the WPhTF listserv on September 8, 2011, a response that appeared to satisfy the person who originally made the two allegations:

I have been asked by an APA member to investigate, in my capacity as APA Ombudsperson, the claim that the Palmer House meeting rooms are not all wheelchair accessible.

I have now spoken directly with two Sales representatives for meeting services at the Palmer House Hilton.

The Palmer House Hilton meeting rooms are 100 percent accessible. There are two meeting rooms—the Honore and the Empire—that are accessible only by an elevator that hotel security must unlock (for user safety) and at which the Palmer House stations “Blue Coats” to assist in use of those elevators. The APA has NOT contracted either of those two meeting rooms. Thus all of the meeting rooms that the Central Division APA will be using are accessible by regular elevators. With respect to guest rooms, the Palmer House Hilton has somewhat less than ten guest rooms that are fully compliant with ADA regulations, but it has more than two dozen guest rooms that qualify as accessible. The sales representative assures me that this is a sufficient number of rooms.

Though not requested, I will also respond to the additional claim that David Schrader, Executive Director of the APA, acted improperly by referring the request to form a new APA committee for disabled philosophers to the Inclusiveness Committee rather than to the Committee on Committees. The Committee on Committee’s function is to review the individuals who have been nominated for various open positions on APA committees and to propose a slate of candidates for those positions to the Board of Officers for their vote. Thus it does not fall within the purview of the Committee on Committees to advise on proposals for new committees. The appropriate procedure was indeed to refer this request to the Inclusiveness Committee since the proposal was to form a new diversity committee.

I would encourage individuals not to accept word of mouth allegations or reports without first examining readily available information. For example, the floor plan for the Palmer House Hilton meeting rooms is available at the Palmer House website, and the banks of elevators are clearly indicated in x’d boxes on those floor plans; information about the functions of various committees is available at the APA website, and information specifically about the Committee on Committees is available at the “About APA” page.
