

Students defend CU-Boulder philosophy professor under fire as 'excellent teacher'

By Sarah Kuta , Camera Staff Writer

Updated: 08/07/2014 07:42:10 PM MDT

DailyCamera.com



University of Colorado associate philosophy professor David Barnett

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Current and former students defended David Barnett on Thursday after learning of the [University of Colorado's move to fire the associate philosophy professor](#), saying he is a good person and a valuable teacher.

Chancellor Phil DiStefano has issued Barnett a notice of intent to dismiss — the first step in the long process to fire a tenured professor — in connection with accusations that Barnett retaliated against a graduate student who reported she was sexually assaulted by a fellow student.

Barnett is accused of compiling a 38-page report painting the victim as "sexually promiscuous" and alleging she falsified the report of the assault, according to the victim's notice of intent to sue CU.

Through his attorney, Barnett claims that the report — which is not publicly available — described inconsistencies in witness testimony about the alleged assault brought before CU's Office of Discrimination and Harassment.

Kyra Rehman, a former undergraduate student in CU's philosophy department, said she was at the party where the alleged sexual assault occurred. She is listed as a witness in a Boulder police report about the incident.

Rehman said Barnett approached her to see whether they could talk about the testimony she provided the Office of Discrimination and Harassment about that night.

Rehman, who said she was friends with both the victim and the alleged assailant, saw a copy of the Office of Discrimination and Harassment's findings and noticed inconsistencies in its depiction of her testimony.

When she talked with Barnett, they only discussed the Office of Discrimination and Harassment findings and her testimony.

"At no point did Barnett make any judgments on anyone involved in the case," Rehman, 24, said in an interview with the Camera. "Our conversation was purely related to ODH and the way they handled this."

"Barnett never, ever told me who he thought was guilty or innocent, or who he thought was right or wrong. He just noticed inconsistencies in the report."

'Gross overreaction'

Rebecca Chan, a current doctoral student within the department, also stepped forward to defend Barnett,

who she said was her dissertation adviser.

Chan, who started at CU in 2007, said she met Barnett in her first week on campus.

"I've had the chance to get to know him on and off campus, and he is one of the best people I've met," she said. "In addition to being a brilliant philosopher, he is an excellent teacher who can communicate with students on their level and inspires them."

She added that she feels safe coming to him for help with professional and personal problems, and believes that he "saved" at least one suicidal student.

Chan said that Barnett "never said a word" against either the victim or the alleged assailant in the sexual assault case. She said the university's decision to fire Barnett is a "gross overreaction."

"That (Barnett) has retaliated or smeared the name of (the victim) is false," she said.

BFA monitoring the case

Faculty members, many of whom declined to comment on the record for this story, were instructed by email to preserve any records relating to the case because of current or future litigation.

The email named Barnett, the victim and the alleged assailant in the sexual assault.

"Do not discuss this matter with anyone outside the presence of university counsel or the risk management review process," the email from CU's legal office said. "Failure to keep this information confidential may result in a waiver of the attorney/client privilege."

For its part, the body that represents faculty interests on the campus is "monitoring" the processes being followed to terminate Barnett, said Boulder Faculty Assembly chairman Paul Chinowsky.

"It is very rare that the University of Colorado undertakes such processes and we all take this very seriously," he said. "It is clear that there are different perspectives on this issue from the parties involved."

"The BFA is committed to making sure all faculty have the opportunity to have their cases appealed as outlined by the regents' (policies) and we support the process being followed in this specific case."

Contact Camera Staff Writer Sarah Kuta at 303-473-1106, kutas@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/sarahkuta.