

From: Graeme R Forbes Graeme.Forbes@Colorado.EDU
Subject: Fwd: Should one protest when a colleague is badly mistreated?
Date: January 24, 2014 at 12:16 AM
To: tenure tenure-track faculty phil-tenure@lists.Colorado.EDU

FYI. I don't know who J Murphy is. GF

Begin forwarded message:

From: James Murphy <james.murphy.sanfrancisco@gmail.com>
Date: January 23, 2014 8:37:37 PM MST
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Subject: Should one protest when a colleague is badly mistreated?

Heads of Departments and
Program Directors
University of Colorado, Boulder

Dear Heads of Departments and Program Directors,

A friend of mine has been following events involving a member of your university – Professor Adler – and I've read a document that my friend produced, in which she argues that people in the administration there have been guilty of a number of things, including defamation of character, violation of academic freedom, violation of due process, intimidation of Professor Adler in an attempt to get her to resign, and then, finally, in an ongoing attempt to cover up what they did and their motives. She also said that it seems to her that members of faculty at the University of Colorado have, at least publicly, been more or less completely silent about the matter!

It struck me as hard to believe that this was so, given the strong statements by outside bodies such as the AAUP and the ACLU, three of which I've attached. My initial reaction, therefore, was to suggest to my friend that she probably had a mistaken impression because she's not there, and so is not aware of what people are doing. It turned out, however, that she had what seemed to me to be a fairly good basis for her pessimistic view.

People often tell me I'm too forward, and I hope that you won't be angry at me for writing, but I think that if I were at a university and one of my colleagues had been treated the way that it seems that Professor Adler has been treated, I would want to speak out, and to protest publicly, in part simply because of the way the other person had been treated, but also because of the possibly that the administrators involved might go on to do things that would harm other members of faculty, or violate their academic freedom, thereby discouraging others from teaching courses that someone might find 'offensive' or 'controversial'.

Of course, I don't really know whether I would in fact have the courage to act on my own, especially if I did not have tenure, since I might very well be afraid that doing so would mean that the administrators involved might retaliate against me at some future point in a way that might harm my career. So it could well be that I wouldn't be willing to act on my own. But I would like to believe that I would do something.

Probably, I would ask other people in my department to join with me in passing a departmental motion censuring the administrators involved, so that I wasn't acting on my own. Alternatively, if others were afraid to do that, then, if there were some sort of faculty assembly or senate, I would ask others in my department to join with me in asking our department's representative to put forward a motion of censure there.

Consequently, while I can certainly see why one might initially be very hesitant to speak out, in the end I feel very strongly that silence is not acceptable. Consequently, I'm afraid that I'm inclined to say, "Shame on you all!"

Perhaps I'm being unfair? Perhaps you and your colleagues are not convinced that the administrators in question did anything wrong in their treatment of Professor Adler? Or is it that you do think they did, but that you don't want to run the risk of some sort of retaliation if you take a stand on the matter? Or is it just that, if you know Professor Adler, she is not one of your favorite university colleagues, and that you therefore are not inclined to do anything? Or is there some other explanation of what appears to me to be a surprising failure on the part of members of the faculty to act?

Thanks in advance for any thoughts you have about this, and my sincere apologies if what I have said offends anyone. But, like my friend, I do think it is a very important matter.

With best regards,

Jim Murphy

P.S. I would have liked to have written to all of the faculty there about this, but that would have taken forever. If you don't think this letter is completely crazy or unfair, I hope that some of you will consider forwarding it to members of your department or program. As far as I can see – and I realize, of course, that I'm not on the scene, and that things might look different if I were – it certainly seems to me that people there should be strongly protesting against the administration's treatment of Professor Adler.