

September 28, 2010

Professor Namita Goswami
Department of Philosophy
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Committee A of the Illinois Conference of the American Association of University Professors has determined that various aspects of her promotion and tenure are at variance with AAUP guidelines and procedures that deal with due process, promotion and tenure. Doctor Namita Goswami, assistant professor of philosophy at DePaul University contacted the American Association of University Professors-Illinois Conference on July 8, 2010. The contact was by e-mail to me with the subject "request." Her request was for assistance and intervention as a result of her recent notification that she had been denied tenure and promotion to associate professor and received a terminal contract for the 2010-2011 academic year. Committee A members are Matthew Abraham (DePaul University), Kurt Field (Bradley University) and John Wilson (editor of *Illinois Academe*). Committee A of the Illinois AAUP has received dozens of inquiries. Most were handled with the chair's intervention by a direct meeting, phone calls, e-mail or a combination of the above. Some of the inquiries involved two members of the committee but there were no formal report or request for national intervention. The committee believes only in clear and convincing circumstances should it either launch a full-scale inquiry or seek a national Committee A investigation. This is the first case that the Illinois Conference Committee A is requesting national AAUP intervention due to significant violations of numerous AAUP documents in the areas of academic freedom, transparency, due process and academic discrimination.

Assistant Professor Namita Goswami arrived at DePaul in 2003. She had recently received her Ph.D. from Emory University. She was hired, as confirmed in multiple documents ranging from the university's job-search advertisement (Doc 1) and her letter of application (Doc 2) to the philosophy department, for the position of critical race and feminist theory.

Dr. Goswami has an impressive record of academic achievement. These range from her receiving the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Excellence in Teaching Award in May 2007, her multiple publications including an article in *Signs*, the preeminent journal in women's studies and presentations at national organizations in her discipline. This record encompasses many peer reviewed articles, peer reviewed book chapters and a monograph in late-stages of revision: *Subjects That Matter: Philosophy, Feminism, and Postcolonial Theory*. (Book under advance contract with State University of New York Press.)

During her probationary period she stopped the tenure clock for a year due to a research leave and was scheduled to apply for promotion to associate professor and tenure during the 2009-2010 academic year, her seventh year at the university. However, during the Spring quarter of 2009, her department under the aegis of the dean, convened an Ad Hoc Personnel Committee (Doc 3) to conduct "formal reviews" of various candidates that were scheduled for a summative tenure review the following academic year. This committee preemptively voted 3-1 against granting Dr. Namita Goswami tenure and promotion before her formal application for tenure. The DePaul University handbook requires formal reviews of tenure-track faculty during their second and fourth year of service. This third formal review, as clearly described in the Ad Hoc

Committee report's first sentence, should have been deferred until the tenure review itself during the 2009-2010 academic year.

The Ad Hoc Personnel Committee even recommended a terminal contract that suggested summary non-reappointment *prior* to the university-wide tenure review scheduled during her seventh probationary year. The Ad Hoc Personnel Committee predicted she would not receive a recommendation for promotion and tenure from the department and stated if Dr. Goswami were to receive tenure over the department's opposition, she would not be a "productive scholar." Its recommendation to Dean Chuck Suchar, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was: "Terminate Contract." It was mentioned in the report that a dissenting opinion within the Ad Hoc Personnel Committee questioned the premature nature of this action.

The AAUP "Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments" states: "They cannot, for example, be dismissed before the end of a term appointment except for adequate cause that has been demonstrated through academic due process—a right they share with tenured members of the faculty." While Dean Suchar refused to offer a terminal contract, this action by the ad hoc committee was essentially an effort to accelerate her termination prior to the aforementioned agreed upon probationary period. The facts are such an adversarial recommendation to "terminate contract" was recommended prior to Dr. Goswami's submission of her full panoply of documentation. Documents submitted to the Ad Hoc Philosophy Department Committee included a sixty-nine page draft prospectus of her monograph submission to SUNY, some syllabi and other published work. Yet she was not able to submit internal and external evaluator reviews until the next academic year and had not yet fully developed her monograph. Formal departmental mandated student reports had not been prepared as well. This premature formal review did not afford Dr. Goswami the opportunity to either submit a full range of documentation or allow the department to examine its own required documentation of vital student input. (see p. 5) This expressly contravenes the *Redbook* "Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments":

"b. Opportunity to Submit Material

Probationary faculty members should be advised of the time when decisions affecting renewal and tenure are ordinarily made, and they should be given the opportunity to submit material that they believe will be helpful to an adequate consideration of their circumstances."

Committee A of the Illinois AAUP believes the Department of Philosophy's, "Department Procedures for Appointment, Retention, Tenure, and Promotion of Staff" (Doc 10) is in explicit violation of AAUPs "On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation." This is one of four distinct categories used for evaluation. Three is the norm in the academy that assess teaching, scholarship and service:

"collegiality, helpfulness and cooperation with students and staff and service to the community both inside and outside the university."

"On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation" states that "collegiality is not a distinct capacity to be assessed independently of the traditional triumvirate of teaching, scholarship, and service...A distinct criterion of collegiality also holds the potential of chilling faculty debate and

discussion.” The minutes of the Department of Philosophy Meeting of May 29, 2009 (Doc 4) contains disparate views on the significance of her alleged lack of attendance at department meetings and her not being engaged in “the life of the department over the past year.” Yet Dr. Goswami’s curriculum vitae (Doc 15) chronicles a rich and varied service to the department both through departmental committee service and tireless work with students outside the classroom. The minority report of May, 2009 (Doc 5) expressly challenges this alleged lack of departmental engagement: “Professor Goswami has attended key events in the department...”

The AAUP document “On Collegiality as a Criterion for Faculty Evaluation” has great relevance to this case:

“The very real potential for a distinct criterion of “collegiality” to cast a pall of stale uniformity places it in direct tension with the value of faculty diversity in all its contemporary manifestations.”

The Ad Hoc Philosophy Department Committee report, May 2009, raises the issue of collegiality in alleging that Dr. Goswami is unreceptive to criticism. Examples are curiously absent. Her lack of collegiality or devotion to the department also appears in the department’s formal opposition to granting tenure in its undated but presumably January 2010 report to Dean Suchar. It was also noted with harsh criticism that Dr. Goswami has interests other than continental philosophy and that her true devotion is to women’s studies: one of the major areas of her appointment and professional service to the department. The departmental minority report does not support such a claim or contain any hint of an absence of collegiality. Extensive student documentation in evaluations, surveys and formal assessment also confirms that Dr. Goswami is very receptive to student views and extremely open to disparate views in class. The category of “helpfulness and cooperation with students” is a formal component of the Department of Philosophy’s assessment metrics. Collegiality with students is affirmed in numerous reports of accessibility and out-of-class interactions and should be noted if this ephemeral and highly subjective component of assessment is introduced. We believe it should not be a separate category as a committee dedicated to supporting AAUP policies and reports but to the extent that a lack of collegiality is raised, the entire picture should be contextualized in the spirit of fairness and accuracy.

The epochal 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure declares:

1. Teachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties.

The Department of Philosophy report (Doc 22), which contained an 11-7-1 vote against granting tenure and promotion, and the Ad Hoc Committee report essentially seek to cashier Dr. Goswami for engaging in research that a majority find objectionable: Mainly doing her job as a scholar in postcolonial theory, critical race and feminist theory and linking them to the discipline of philosophy. In reading the various documents one might adduce it was a departmental debate on whether a job listing should be advertised that solicits non-continental philosophic concentration. But it is not: it is our judgment this violates Dr. Goswami’s academic freedom to engage in “full freedom in research and in the publication of the results.” The department violates her academic

freedom to concentrate in those areas of her scholarship and teaching that challenges the ethos of traditional disciplinary exploration of many departmental members. It merits continuous

referencing that Dr. Goswami was doing her job and excelling in those areas of philosophy that her appointment required. This is verified by the initial job advertisement and reaffirmed by both Dean Suchar and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Personnel Committee (Doc 28) which voted unanimously 5-0 to recommend tenure and promotion. This college-level unit report (March 2010) described her scholarship as “groundbreaking work that is pushing the field.” Furthermore, the Department of Philosophy minority report confirms “the department in hiring her applauded... along with her postcolonialist work, new areas to the department.”

Many departmental colleagues once again gratuitously concluded that Professor Goswami’s interests allegedly lay outside of philosophy and that she was “virtually absent from the life of the philosophy department” for one of the seven years of her probationary period. One has the academic freedom to explore content areas and engage in partnering and networking with a wide range of colleagues in diverse disciplines. It was educed arbitrarily that Professor Goswami has a much more extensive service record in Women’s and Gender Studies than in the Department of Philosophy. For one faculty member, the service record strongly suggested that Professor Goswami feels much more at home in Women’s and Gender Studies than in Philosophy. Yet Dr. Goswami’s interdisciplinary approach to philosophy includes non-traditional, non-canonical, post-colonial, subaltern methodology that the 1940 Statement is intended to protect.

There appears to be a club-like atmosphere and a narrow perception of the discipline in the Department of Philosophy that is most troubling to the Illinois Committee A. There is palpable resentment that Dr. Goswami’s challenges the canon and evinces scholarly attachment to explore developing-world women, particularly Indian and Asian Indian-American women that draws upon an admixture of theoretical perspectives. These include postcolonial, critical race and feminist theories. We encountered in the documentation unwarranted condemnation of a colleague for developing interdisciplinary networks and skills.

The Department of Philosophy report criticized Dr. Goswami for not possessing German-language fluency in pursuing primary-source research on Theodor Adorno. This may well be an area, as Dr. Goswami noted, that could merit greater development. Since one of her chapters from her dissertation is on Adorno and she has explored his writings as they relate to other discourses, such knowledge would embellish what is already steady progress in Adorno-related scholarship. Her expertise, however, is postcolonial theory as it pertains to Indian and Asian Indian-American women. Her native fluency in Hindi as well as competencies in other non-European languages such as Punjabi and Urdu are not cited by the department. An applicant for tenure, however, need not exhibit superior accomplishments in every aspect of scholarship. Indeed, one would be surprised if a probationary faculty member would have attained such a level of achievement that would preclude subsequent growth. In the context of a significant dossier of scholarly productivity, it appears to be an exaggerated fault line in denying tenure on the basis of inadequate scholarship. The facts are that her monograph, *Subjects That Matter: Philosophy, Feminism, and Postcolonial Theory*, explores the scholarship of Adorno in conjunction with the work of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak and African-American feminist Barbara Christian, and is under advanced contract with a major university press: the State University of New York (SUNY).

The Philosophy Department in its non-recommendation for tenure and promotion declared Dr. Goswami is not suitably equipped to direct future generations of postcolonial theorists at the

doctoral level. Demonstrably their own data simply reject this. Students are required in the Department of Philosophy to file detailed reports on both undergraduate (Doc 19-20) and graduate levels (Doc 21) for all tenure-track faculty at the end of their probationary period. Students have a vote on tenure cases. Dr. Goswami directs two dissertations, is a co-director of a third and serves as a reader of four other dissertations. The solicited graduate-student report describes a professor who is highly regarded by doctoral candidates. Both the quantitative and qualitative summaries are uniformly positive if not glowing in their affirmation of her pedagogy. One doctoral candidate notes tellingly that while under the tutelage of Dr. Goswami it precipitated “learning how to converse about one’s work in a larger philosophical community.” Another graduate student praised her being “fluent and rigorous across multiple fields.” Such commentary which is representative of this outstanding teacher appears to vitiate anecdotal suggestions of scholarly incapacity to teach, train and guide future doctoral candidates. Graduate student data reveal strong student approval of her interdisciplinary and expansive approach to philosophy. She is already succeeding in the area of guiding and inspiring doctoral-level graduate students in philosophy.

One can discern ironically from the Philosophy Department report not only an absence of collegiality but also a hostility that challenges any claim of objectivity in assessing her scholarship. One member of the Philosophy Department asserted that this scholar, with a Ph.D. from Emory University, is intellectually inferior: “As yet another faculty member put it, “it is not a ‘writing problem,’ it’s a ‘thinking problem.’” A disturbingly sexist comment is proffered that only when co-authoring an article with her husband, did her scholarship improve: “This colleague went on to note that the essay co-authored with her husband is the strongest of the published work.” **Nota bene:** A Philosophy Department minority report claims the issue of spousal contribution to her work was NOT even raised at the general philosophy department meeting but was unilaterally inserted afterwards by the department’s rapporteur. (Doc 27 Larabee, January 23, 2010)

The Department of Philosophy is explicit that continental philosophy is the order of the day and the prized core disciplinary concentration. Yet it cannot be considered the *exclusive* area based on the stated components of Dr. Goswami’s initial appointment. This declaration of departmental preferences is disruptive of the academic freedom of Dr. Goswami. There is a clear and palpable resentment in departmental reports that Dr. Goswami is not a specialist, despite related research interests on Adorno, in continental philosophy. Despite minority reports, external evaluators and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) personnel committee’s refutation of such charges against Dr. Goswami, the secretive (see below) University Board on Promotion and Tenure (UBPT) refused to sustain the CLAS and college dean’s recommendations for tenure and promotion. It must be noted that Dean Suchar in his e-mail of June 18, 2010 affirms that Dr. Goswami was neither hired nor expected to teach primarily continental philosophy and never presented her scholarly credentials as a continental philosopher:

“You would be working in scholarly areas that attempted to link aspects of women's and gender studies, post-colonial theory, critical race theory to philosophy - you were not hired as only a continental philosopher -that's not your academic background and you've never claimed to be such.” (Doc 32 at end of email) Yet the principal reason for the recommendation against tenure is the unsubstantiated allegation of substandard research and an elitist resentment that the specialization of her scholarship is in post-colonial theory and non-continental (non-European)

philosophy. It is apparent Dr. Goswami encountered for the first time at the end of her probationary period departmental criticism that the areas that she was hired to teach and develop her research were not acceptable to the department. This is unfair, unreasonable and unjust.

Several members of Illinois Committee A have noted over a period of years since the Norman Finkelstein and Mehrene Larudee tenure-denial cases in 2007, a systemic problem with DePaul University's rank and tenure due process procedures. The UBPT is the highest unit of faculty that assesses each tenure candidate. While tenure-track faculty are invited to an oral hearing, the UBPT does not provide the candidate with its final recommendation but merely transmits it to the president of the university. We have observed over time that The Reverend Fr. Dennis H. Holtschneider appears to accept always the UBPT report. While one may concur that only in exceptional circumstances should a university president reverse the decision of a faculty committee, this situation is untenable due to its utter lack of transparency. Due to the near absolute power of the UBPT in presidential implementation of its recommendations concerning the granting of tenure and promotion, the absence of transparency in providing written documentation to the applicant is egregious. Fr. Holtschneider frequently provides a mere sentence or two summation of the report. (Doc 29) He does not copy the UBPT report to the candidate who cannot challenge directly an adversarial UBPT report upon appeal. DePaul tenure-track faculty never see, perhaps, the most important assessment document in their academic careers at the Chicago institution.

The "Statement on Procedural Standards in the Renewal or Nonrenewal of Faculty Appointments" in its sections on "Notice of Reasons" and "In Writing" states "that nontenured faculty members notified of nonreappointment should, upon request, receive a statement of the reasons for the decision." The president's denial of tenure letter is too brief to satisfy the standard of "Notice of Reasons." The lack of UBPT transparency fails to meet the standards of notification of committee evaluations with the subject of the report.

After careful and judicious perusal of the matter of Dr. Namita Goswami, the Illinois Conference Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure believes DePaul University at various levels of review has demonstrated a reckless disregard for academic freedom, academic due process, transparency and has failed to delimit tenure reviews to the tripartite areas of teaching, scholarship and service.

Sincerely,

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