



The Society for the Study of Social Problems

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December 23, 2013

Provost Russell L. Moore

Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Provost
University of Colorado at Boulder
2055 Regent Drive, Room 360
Boulder, CO 80309-0040

Dear Provost Moore:

I am the Executive Officer of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) and I am writing on behalf of our Board regarding recent events surrounding Dr. Patti Adler's "Deviance" class. We recognize that how this is resolved ultimately is between Dr. Adler and the University of Colorado, but, as you know, this "case" has raised some concerns nationwide among faculty and others concerned with issues of academic freedom and due process.

Our understanding, based on statements by Dr. Adler and some of her colleagues, news reports, and statements by the administration, is that Dr. Adler employed a teaching technique (which, apparently, she has used for many years) which a former teaching assistant found objectionable and resulted in complaints from some students. Our concern was with the process employed to follow up on the complaints. It was our understanding, and please correct me if I am mistaken, that Dr. Adler was not given the opportunity to respond to the findings and recommendations of investigators from your Office of Discrimination and Harassment, but instead was given the "option" of retiring or, if she stayed, she would not be able to teach "Deviance" in the spring and would only be able to teach it in the future after a review of the course. We are pleased to learn that the university has now reversed course and that Dr. Adler, if she chooses to stay, will be able to teach "Deviance" in the spring after a departmental review of the course. We read this, in part, as an acknowledgement by the university that this matter was not handled appropriately, and we commend you for allowing the department to deal with a matter that should have been addressed by the department from the beginning. But there is another issue that is at play here that concerns us, and that is the issue of academic freedom.

While we understand, and please keep in mind that some of our members are also university administrators, and many of us are or have been Chairs, that universities have to be careful in a world that has become increasingly litigious, we have to guard against allowing the fear of a lawsuit from chipping away at one of the pillars of academia, and that is academic freedom. While there are limits to what we should be able to do in the classroom, we should always err on the side of academic freedom. If not, it is

too easy for someone with a political agenda to silence those with whom s/he does not agree, and it can have a chilling effect, not only on what and how we teach, but also on the type of research conducted by faculty. If anything, we should encourage faculty to push the envelope, to get students out of their comfort zones, and to be innovative in the classroom as teachers. This is how knowledge is generated and imparted. So, while we are glad that this issue will be resolved by the department, we worry that it has already had a chilling effect on others, and especially untenured and non-tenure-track faculty.

We trust that you will consider our concerns in the constructive manner in which we have offered them. Hopefully, the department will resolve the matter in a way that is fair to all parties and that if Dr. Adler chooses to retire, she will do so free from coercion of any kind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Delgado', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.
Executive Officer

Cc: Dean Steven Leigh, College of Arts & Sciences
Dr. Joanne Belknap, Department Chair, Department of Sociology
Dr. Patricia Adler, Professor, Department of Sociology