



The Society for the Study of Social Problems
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July 5, 2017

Dr. Joanne Berger-Sweeney, President
Trinity College
300 Summit Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Dear President Berger-Sweeney:

We are writing on behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), one of the oldest and most respected social science organizations in the United States, to express concern about the case of Dr. Johnny Eric Williams, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Trinity College. Cases such as this concern us because we are a social justice organization and, more importantly, if an injustice occurs and is allowed to stand, it paves the way for further injustices.

We are aware of the letter sent to you by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) on June 27, 2017 and share the storied organization's commitment to academic freedom as expressed in their letter. We also share the AAUP's concern regarding the reasons for Dr. Williams's suspension and the impact that such a suspension can have on an individual's career and personal reputation. Suspending someone is a very serious action and should be taken only in cases where there is clear and verifiable misconduct or a clear and strong possibility of immediate harm to the individual. Not only does neither appear to be the cause of the suspension in this case, we also have not seen evidence that Dr. Williams was given due process before the action was taken. If we are mistaken, we would appreciate being corrected. If we are correct, we urge you to reverse your decision and reinstate Dr. Williams immediately.

In closing, there is a larger issue here that should not be ignored, and that is efforts by some individuals and groups to suppress the free expression of ideas. Citizens in democratic societies cannot allow the forces of anti-free speech and anti-academic freedom to gain a strong foothold in our institutions, and especially in academia. We understand that the College is reviewing the case to see if Dr. Williams violated a college policy or procedure. We trust and hope that Dr. Williams will receive due process and that the process will not be influenced by these outside pressures, but rather by an unyielding commitment to academic freedom.

This is an opportunity for those of us in the academic community to provide the type of leadership sorely needed in a country that is as divided as the United States is currently, including along racial and ethnic lines. If someone does not agree with Dr. Williams, we need to tell her or him to make a better argument. No doubt Dr. Williams would welcome the debate.

Most sincerely,

Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.
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