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Decision to deny tenure spurs anger at DePaul

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KATHRYN WEBER reports on the struggle for two professors denied tenure because of their political views.

OFFICIALS AT DePaul University caved to pressure from pro-Israel ideologues, denying tenure for Norman Finkelstein, an outspoken supporter of Palestinian rights--and then announced that they were withholding tenure for another professor who actively supported Finkelstein's cause.

But students at DePaul are taking action in opposition to the university's rulings, which amount to a pink slip for Finkelstein and Mehrene Larudee, two of the more progressive professors on the Chicago campus.

Finkelstein's bid for tenure was opposed by his long-time adversary, Harvard professor Alan Dershowitz, who spent the last several years harassing DePaul faculty and staff with e-mails and documents that slandered Finkelstein.

Nevertheless, Finkelstein's application for tenure was strongly supported by the political science department and personnel committee of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. But DePaul's dean opposed tenure, as, apparently, did the University Board on Tenure and Promotion (UBTP).

Students and faculty came to Finkelstein's defense, organizing a petition of support and holding pickets and meetings to draw attention to the case, as the issue went to DePaul's president, Father Dennis Holtschneider, for a final decision.

The university's rejection of Finkelstein was announced June 8, at the start of finals week.

If Finkelstein's tenure bid was always controversial because of the intervention of Dershowitz and other pro-Israel ideologues, the rejection of Larudee was a shock. Her application had been unanimously approved at every previous level of the tenure process, and she was preparing to take over as chair of the university's International Studies program.

Larudee's supporters among faculty say the only reason they can think of for the decision is that she spoke out in defense of Finkelstein--and her brother is also involved in working for justice for Palestine.

WHEN HOLTSCHNEIDER'S decision was announced June 8, at the start of finals week, angry student supporters of the two popular professors met

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to plan for actions.

On the following Monday, June 11, 12 students entered Holtschneider's offices at 8:30 a.m., where they were greeted by Campus Safety, making clear that news of a planned sit-in had reached the president.

The students met with Holtschneider at 3 p.m. By this time, there were at least 20 students and three alumni present. The students listed their demands, including a public apology to the two professors and a reversal of Holtschneider's tenure decisions. Holtschneider said he would not change his mind.

The students were thrown out of Holtschneider's office under threat of expulsion, and a faculty member and two alumni attorneys were threatened with arrest if they remained. Students then moved the sit-in to the Student Center on DePaul's Lincoln Park campus, where they remained until they were threatened with arrest. Two students then camped outside the campus rectory.

At graduation ceremonies on June 17, students in the audience dropped two banners reading "Tenure for Finkelstein and Larudee" when the university provost began to speak. Nearly 25 graduates refused to shake Holtschneider's hand, instead handing him a letter to inform him they would not be supporting the university financially or otherwise because of the tenure decisions.

There is an ongoing dispute between the administration and faculty at DePaul over the question of an appeals process for tenure decisions. The administration maintains that there is no appeals process, and the faculty insists there is.

The Faculty Council of the university and the Faculty Governance Council of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences each voted to authorize an appeals process, and the Faculty Governance Council voted unanimously to investigate the UBTP. Censure of the administration is also being discussed.

Students will begin a fast, starting June 25, to ensure that the administration knows their commitment is unwavering, and it will not be able to sweep this scandal under the rug during summer break.

A boycott of DePaul has been called, meaning that students are encouraged not to attend, and academics are asked not to speak on campus or apply for jobs there. The American Association of University Professors is considering censuring DePaul.

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