

New York Conference, AAUP  
Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure  
Report  
April 18, 2008

Prepared by Irwin Yellowitz, Chairman

Despite the survey of academic freedom incidents last Spring – sent to 50 chapter chairs with 18 responses; despite a recent article on New York Committee A in New York Academe; and despite the inclusion by Tom Policano in the improved Conference website of Protecting Your Faculty Rights: A Guide Prepared and Distributed by the New York State Conference AAUP, which includes reference to New York Committee A – only one faculty member has consulted with us since my last report in October 2007. This continues the long standing paucity of inquiries that I have commented on in the past.

As we know from the survey of academic freedom for 2006-2007, there were at least 9 incidents, yet only one was referred to New York Committee A. Three others were referred to National Committee A, with notice to New York Committee A. We are ready to assist when requested, although we know that a solution at the local level can be more desirable, and that members often will go directly to National Committee A because of its higher visibility, and the greater potential clout of a national organization. However, our members should realize that consultation with New York Committee A can offer them real benefits, even if the issue ultimately returns to the chapter or National Committee A for resolution.

As concerns National Committee A, we all know the incredible load borne by the highly experienced, but overwhelmed staff. New York Committee A always has envisaged its role as a complement to National Committee A. We can engage in a full discussion with a member, and clarify the issues. It is difficult for National Committee A to do this because of the workload. We can refer a case directly to National Committee A, and then monitor its progress. Our discussion with a member does not prevent the person from approaching National Committee A even if we advise against it. Thus we offer an enhanced level of consultation, usually provided quickly, without reducing the right of a member to proceed to National Committee A.

New York Committee A also can offer advice to a chapter that is dealing with an academic freedom issue. Our involvement is always confidential unless the chapter asks for open action, usually through a letter to administrators. Consultation with New York Committee A can be helpful for the chapter leaders, who may not have much experience with the AAUP Redbook, or academic freedom issues generally, and who can benefit as well from a different perspective on the situation. Again nothing is lost through consultation with New York Committee A, which begins at the chapter's initiative and ends whenever the chapter so decides. We respect the key role of the chapter, and we will not enter into disputes between a member and a chapter. We also do not become

involved where there is a collective bargaining agreement, which has a mechanism for the protection of academic freedom, through the grievance machinery or by some distinct means.

I propose the following for the near future.

1) Continue a periodic article about New York Committee A in New York Academe.

2) Turn the experimental survey of last year into an annual one. We should use the simple form of the initial effort to encourage responses, and to allow for comparative data.

3) Include an expanded item on New York Committee A in the Conference's website. I will work with Tom Policano on how to do this most effectively.

4) Make academic freedom the subject of a program at the Fall 2008 meeting of the Conference. The resulting publicity in New York Academe should be helpful.

My thanks go to the other able members of New York Committee A, who though underutilized stand ready to assist. They are Martin Fried (Syracuse – Law), Jane Koretz (RPI), Lionel Lewis (SUNY Buffalo) and John Thomas (Skidmore).