

September 1, 2010

Mr. James Turk
Executive Director
Canadian Association of University Teachers
2705 Queensview Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Mr. Turk,

I am still awaiting a reply to my request for a CAUT inquiry into the non-renewal of my appointment as Joint Chair in Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University.

I have already communicated to CAUT my concerns about issues of academic freedom, and indicated the parallels between my case and two other cases of non-renewal where CAUT has accepted to undertake an inquiry: those of Dr. Larry Reynolds and Professor Ramesh Thakur.

I would like to underscore again the importance of my case for academic women and women's research chairs. In my opinion, for some fifteen years now, the University of Ottawa and Carleton University have not respected their initial commitment to the Secretariat of State when they were awarded a generous grant of \$500,000 in 1985 to create the Joint Chair in Women's Studies.

I firmly believe that it was my insistence that this commitment be respected, and my wish to restore the Joint Chair to a sound administrative, financial and academic position, that led to the decision, early on, not to renew my appointment.

On July 13 2009, two weeks after I took up the position, I wrote a five page document pointing out several pressing deficiencies in the administrative and financial structures of the Joint Chair, and offering recommendations, including financial re-structuring, to rectify the situation. I submitted this document to the Administrative Committee of the Joint Chair by email, the Directors of the Women's Studies Institute and the Pauline Jewett Women's and Gender Studies, and the two Deans.

On July 30, 2009, at my request, I met with Carleton Vice-President Academic Peter Ricketts to apprise him of the situation. It was clear, as I pointed out, that redressing the administrative structure of the Joint Chair would be a necessary first step to preparing strategies for the fund-raising duties I had been assigned.

In August 2009, a month after my appointment began, I prepared a six-page draft academic plan (enclosed here) to revitalize the Joint Chair. I submitted the plan to both Vice-President Ricketts and University of Ottawa Vice-President Academic François Houle. On September 16, again at my request, I met with Vice-President Houle.

The draft plan set out the context of the Joint Chair, identified four main strategic goals, and provided a detailed three year implementation plan. It also called for a broad consultation of faculty and students on both campuses and local, regional and national women's organizations.

The 1985 federal initiative to establish a designated Chair of Women's Studies was a tremendous sign of support for developing teaching and research on women's studies at the time when few universities gave courses on women's issues.

Planning to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Joint Chair, I was able to consult the Archives at the University of Ottawa. During the first decade of its existence, the Joint Chair worked well, fulfilling its mandate to support women's initiatives on campus, to speak out publicly on issues of interest to women, to defend their rights, and to encourage the development of courses from women's perspectives. The reporting structures were clear. The incumbent (beginning with the Honourable Monique Bégin) chaired the Administrative Committee of the Joint Chair and reported directly to the Vice-President Academic at both universities, including University of Ottawa VPA Professor Susan Mann who had played an important role in bringing the Joint Chair to Ottawa.

However, from the mid 1990s, the Archives show a steady decline in activities and governance. For approximately half the time since 1996, the Joint Chair was unoccupied. On July 1, 2009, when I became the incumbent, I found a Joint Chair in a state of financial and administrative disarray. The websites were rudimentary, and the administrative infrastructure virtually non-existent. The governance structures no longer conformed to the procedures indicated in the documents.

It was unclear what activities were organized using the Joint Chair budget during the years when there was no incumbent and whether administrative work was appropriately assigned to the budget of the Chair or to that of the Institute of Women's Studies at the University of Ottawa and the Pauline Jewett Institute for Women's and Gender Studies at Carleton University.

There were no detailed annual reports. This seems almost incredible, and one could well ask where the funds went.

As the incumbent of the Joint Chair, I felt a responsibility to inform the university authorities of the situation, to restore accountability and a healthy administration.

The failure of both Carleton and the University of Ottawa, for almost 15 years, to increase the endowment fund and to ensure a transparent governance structure, suggests a grave lack of commitment on the part of both universities to the Joint Chair and their obligations under the original agreement with the Secretariat of State.

An analysis of Canadian Tri-Council Research Chairs by Professor Nadia Ghazzali, NSERC Industrielle-Alliance Chair for Women in Science and Engineering at Laval University, shows that women hold only 24.14 % of these Chairs at the University of Ottawa, and only 20.83% at Carleton University. Furthermore, both universities are below the shameful national average of 25.17%.

Given the letter announcing my non-renewal was written by Carleton Dean John Osborne, these figures, and the piteous result for Carleton University, are not surprising.

I am sure CAUT can understand that I felt that it was my duty, as the incumbent Joint Chair, to denounce the deficiencies and lack of accountability in the governance structures and functioning of the Joint Chair. I simply could not stand by and leave the Joint Chair in such disarray.

I think it is a question of principle, an important question of principle, that academic employees have the right to denounce situations of injustice and offer their assistance to help find remedies, without fear of reprisal or loss of employment, all the more so when these situations are related to continued systemic discrimination against an equity seeking group such as women.

This is why I have asked CAUT for an inquiry.

Sincerely,

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