



UNH trustees refuse group's demands to review prof's teaching

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University of New Hampshire trustees defended professor William Woodward in response to a national organization's call for an intensive review of his teaching, including his controversial theory about the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

In a letter to the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, UNH Board of Trustees chairman Andy Lietz said a "careful review" of Woodward found his teaching consistent with accepted standards, "even though he has expressed some ideas that many find objectionable."

"The Board of Trustees has concluded that Professor Woodward exercises appropriate restraint and adheres to professional standards in the classroom," Lietz wrote council president Anne Neal in a letter dated Sept. 6.

The council implored UNH's trustees in its own letter on Sept. 1 to formally investigate Woodward, who has said he suspects the U.S. government orchestrated or knew in advance of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Woodward said he addresses the theory in one of his classes.

"We do not actively support professors who teach Holocaust denial or flat Earth," Neal said in an interview yesterday. "And certainly conspiracy theories of this sort should not be viewed any differently."

Lietz said UNH and its board of trustees analyzed student and peer reviews of Woodward's teaching, along with the professor's class syllabus. The investigation also included a confidential post-tenure review from 2004, part of the university's regular evaluation of all tenured faculty.

UNH provost Bruce Mallory, who lead the investigation, said he discussed the matter with Woodward and interviewed both the chairman of the psychology department and the dean of the College of Liberal Arts.

Neal's organization has repeatedly taken aim at colleges and universities that, they say, abuse the privileges of academic freedom. In May, the council issued a report decrying the proliferation of "politically extreme opinions" on America's college campuses.

"Academic freedom does not mean anything goes," Neal said.

In July, the council praised the University of Wisconsin for investigating professor Kevin Barrett, who like Woodward is a member of Scholars for 9/11 Truth, an organization that promotes the 9/11 conspiracy theory. Barrett retained his job and is teaching a course on Islam this fall.

Last week, Brigham Young University in Utah placed physics professor Steven Jones on paid leave while it investigates statements he made about 9/11. Jones, who co-chairs Scholars for 9/11 Truth, has claimed the Twin Towers were brought down by explosives, possibly planted by the U.S. military.

Mallory said Brigham Young appears to hold a narrower view of academic freedom than does UNH. Unlike UNH, he noted, Brigham Young is private and maintains a religious affiliation.

Since 1998, the American Association of University Professors has censured Brigham Young for failing to observe "generally recognized principles of academic freedom and tenure."

Neal questioned Brigham Young's decision.

"If they have reason to believe the professor is raising wacky theories in the classroom, affecting the education of his students, a formal review would seem to be important," she said. "If, however, they're saying, 'We don't like his ideas,' we do not consider that important."

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