



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

September 9, 2010

Mr. Alan G. Lafley
3 Grandin Riverview Street
Cincinnati, OH 45208-3316

Re: Hamilton College

Dear Mr. Lafley,

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni was saddened to read (*Inside Higher Ed*, July 22, 2010) that the former Dean of Hamilton College, Joseph Urgo, imposed sanctions against history professor Robert Paquette for exercising his constitutional right of free speech.

As you may be aware, Professor Paquette publicly criticized a hiring decision affecting his department. Since to date we have seen no indication that Professor Paquette had access to or divulged any material that was confidential, the former Dean's reprisal against him represents a violation of academic freedom and possibly an actionable violation of his civil rights.

As we understand the circumstances of this matter, the occasion for Professor Paquette's article was the elimination of a junior faculty member named Christopher Hill, self-described as a libertarian, from consideration at the earliest stages of a tenure-track search. Although Professor Hill received the support of some 200 students for his excellence as a teacher, as well as the Sidney Wertimer Award, his candidacy was deemed unworthy of review. Robert Paquette wrote: "A majority faction, similar in composition and outlook, to the one responsible for the [College's] abolition of the Western civilization requirement, determined, despite the dissenting voices of four senior members of the department, that Professor Hill was largely unworthy of serious consideration for the tenure-track position." Professor Paquette was not a member of the search committee nor did he attend the meeting at which Professor Hill's candidacy was discussed. Our understanding is that he had no access to, nor did he reveal, privileged information.

This is an embarrassing situation for Hamilton College in that former Dean Urgo has left Professor Paquette, a distinguished scholar and teacher, sanctioned and barred from participation in faculty searches, and the Hill decision has raised justifiable suspicion that the mechanisms for faculty searches at Hamilton College are subject to irrelevant and

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

1726 M Street, NW, Suite 802 Washington, DC 20036
T (202) 467-6787; (888) ALUMNI-8 F (202) 467-6784 info@goacta.org www.goacta.org

Mr. Alan G. Lafley
September 9, 2010
Page Two

inappropriate political pressures. Given his outstanding record as a teacher, and his publication of an award-winning novel, it is not at all clear why this young professor did not meet the department's standards for further review, or even, for that matter, what standards were actually applied. Given Hamilton's stated focus on teaching—the faculty handbook states: “The quality of teaching is to be the most heavily weighted criterion for reappointment, tenure, and promotion.”—the elimination of Professor Hill so early in the process is particularly suspicious. One is left to believe that Professor Hill is not being judged on his merits but for being out of step with the general faculty orthodoxy. If so, that is a sorry situation indeed.

We write, accordingly, not to interfere in the internal workings of Hamilton College, but to urge the board to undertake a systematic review of hiring procedures, as well as broader issues of intellectual diversity and academic freedom at the College. Calling for such a review is entirely within the power and the fiduciary duty of the board. We are also confident that your attention to these wider issues of academic policy will help the Hamilton administration take appropriate action to ensure that Professor Paquette is treated justly and fairly. Given the fact that the matters outlined above stem from faculty and administrative actions, it is up to the governing board to ensure that Hamilton abides by the highest standards of academic integrity.

For better or for worse, the recent turn of events at Hamilton suggests that the college is not vigorously committed to intellectual diversity. Indeed, the former Dean's reaction seems to be nothing short of an overreaction in an already unwholesome academic climate. Your proactive response will position Hamilton College to avoid situations of this nature in the future and will establish a framework for reviewing and enhancing academic freedom that can serve as a national model. In short, as fiduciaries, you have the opportunity to turn a bad situation into a moment of national leadership.

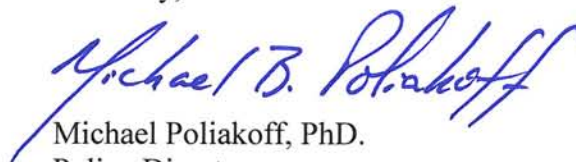
If someone of Professor Hill's excellent record of teaching and popular publication cannot even be considered at Hamilton for a tenure-track job, then who will choose to come there? The future of higher education ultimately depends upon who is teaching—particularly at a small liberal arts college such as Hamilton. If independent minds like Professor Hill are purged, Hamilton will further lose public confidence, and the students—and the parents who look to Hamilton for a quality education and pay dearly for it—will be disserved.

Enclosed please find copies of our two publications on academic freedom and intellectual diversity: “Intellectual Diversity: Time for Action” and “Protecting the Free Exchange of Ideas: How Trustees Can Advance Intellectual Diversity on Campus.” ACTA would be pleased at any time to speak with you or to make a presentation to the board on academic freedom and appropriate board actions to protect and foster it.

Mr. Alan G. Lafley
September 9, 2010
Page Three

We thank you for your service and look forward to hearing from you on how you will address this serious matter of academic freedom and accountability.

Sincerely,



Michael Poliakoff, PhD.
Policy Director

Enclosures

Cc: Ralph E. Hansmann, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
James L. Ferguson, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Robert G. Howard, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
James T. Rhind, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Eugenie A. Havemeyer, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Elizabeth J. McCormack, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Francis H. Musselman, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Donald R. Osborn, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Gerald V. Dirvin, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Silas Keehn, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
David E. Harden, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Hans H. Schambach, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Keith S. Wellin, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Christina E. Carroll, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Stuart L. Scott, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Kevin W. Kennedy, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Charles O. Svenson, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Susan Valentine, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Lee C. Garcia, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Nancy Ferguson Seeley, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Chester A. Siuda, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Stephen H. Anthony, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Howard J. Schneider, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Thomas J. Schwarz, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
David E. Mason, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Joseph F. Anderson, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Drew S. Days, III, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Sean K Fitzpatrick, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Ellis E. Bradford, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees

Mary Burke Partridge, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Patricia Tolles Smalley, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
George F. Little, II, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
A. Barrett Seaman, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Arthur J. Massolo, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Joel W. Johnson, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Susan E. Skerritt, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Jack Withiam, Jr., member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Henry W. Bedford, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Linda E. Johnson, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Robert V. Delaney, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Amy Owens Goodfriend, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
John G. Rice, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Joan Hinde Stewart, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Jaime E. Yordan, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Stephen I. Sadove, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Richard Bernstein, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
David M. Solomon, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
David W. Blood, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Philip E. Lewis, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Robert S. Morris, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Ronald R. Pressman, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Harold W. Bogle, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Ann B. Hutchins, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Alexander C. Sacerdote, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
George D. Baker, Jr., member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Torrence D. Moore, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Nancy Roob, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Julia K. Cowles, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Daniel T.H. Nye, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
John H. Emmons, Jr., member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Jennifer Murphy Hill, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Gregory J. Robitaille, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees
Thomas J. Tull, member, Hamilton College Board of Trustees