

Dennis Jacobs  
Provost  
Santa Clara University

November 2, 2017

Dear Dennis,

We write to express our concern about the University's decision during the 2016-2017 academic year to overturn the decision of the Associated Student Government Student Senate to deny an application by a chapter of Turning Point USA (TPUSA) to become a Registered Student Organization. While we support freedom of speech, we argue here that the Professor Watchlist, sponsored by TPUSA chapters, poses a real and serious threat to academic freedom and the safety of our faculty.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has raised serious concerns about the threat to academic freedom represented by TPUSA, and especially its sponsorship of the national "[Professor Watchlist](#)." We note that the students involved with the Santa Clara University chapter of TPUSA refused to distance themselves from the Watchlist project when asked about it both during and after the application process (see, e.g., *The Santa Clara* interviews with some of these students). As you may recall, many SCU faculty also objected to a student organization committed to advancing the goals of the Professor Watchlist. These objections included a letter signed by 86 faculty members published in *The Santa Clara* and in numerous online contributions to the Faculty General Distribution list.

We write here to explain briefly the AAUP's concerns and propose the opening of a dialogue about these concerns with the University's leadership.

#### The AAUP Concerns

On January 31, 2017, the AAUP released a statement called "[Targeted Online Harassment of Faculty](#)." We urge you to read it and share it with the University's leadership, including the Board of Trustees. The statement notes that the Professor Watchlist is a "descendant" of earlier threats to academic freedom represented by the John Birch Society in the 1960's and the Accuracy in Academia movement in the 1980's. The statement says, in part:

A website like Professor Watchlist, which purports to identify faculty who "discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom" and which had initially also aimed to identify those who "promote anti-American values," lists names of professors with their institutional affiliations and photographs, thereby making it easy for would-be stalkers and cyberbullies to target them. Individual faculty members who have been included on such lists or singled out elsewhere have been subject to threats of physical violence, including sexual assault, through hundreds of e-mails, calls, and social media postings. Such threatening messages are likely to stifle the free expression of the targeted faculty member; further, the publicity that such cases attract can cause others to self-censor so as to avoid being subjected to similar treatment. Thus, targeted online harassment is a threat to academic freedom.

The concerns raised by the AAUP have proven to be all too accurate.

#### University of Montana

Tobin Miller Shearer, director of the African-American Studies Program at the University of Montana, whose name is on the Watchlist, announced a new course this fall called "White Supremacy History/Defeat" by posting a flyer on a campus bulletin board. The next day, according to the [Missoulian](#), Shearer discovered that:

another sign — designed to look just like Shearer's poster — had been put up atop his, this one detailing a fictitious course "Black Nationalism History/Defeat." Whoever made the new flyer had copied Shearer's layout, including the font and location of a photo, and changing the bullet points of the course

objectives from ones like Shearer's "Implement and evaluate a project to dismantle white supremacy in the U.S." to the same line directed at "black nationalism."

### Trinity College

This year Professor Johnny Williams, an African-American sociologist at Trinity College in Connecticut who specializes in religion, culture and race, faced threats so serious, according to the [Hartford Courant](#), that he and his family were forced into hiding after conservative websites criticized several of his social media postings. TPUSA then placed his name on their Watchlist. Trinity College shut down the campus for a day and Professor Williams was, over the objections of the AAUP, placed on paid leave pending an investigation.

It is no coincidence that both incidents focused on faculty who teach and conduct research on issues involving race. While TPUSA presents itself as primarily concerned with economic issues such as free markets, its most visible national effort, the Professor Watchlist, focuses heavily on racial issues and faculty of color. There are currently 239 academics on the Professor Watchlist. At the end of last year, when the list had 147 names, an [analysis](#) by Peter Phillips, a sociologist at Sonoma State University, concluded that:

Turning Point's methodology for selection of professors to include on the list seems to arise from student tips and secondary information with unverified assertions resulting in an extremely biased and racist list. Blacks on the *Professor Watch List* are over three times more likely to be included than any other ethnicity....

### The Responsibility of University Governing Boards

The AAUP closed its statement on Targeted Online Harassment with a clear expression of its support for free speech, reminding Governing Boards of colleges and universities that they "have a responsibility to defend academic freedom and institutional autonomy, including to protect institutions from undue public interference, by resisting calls for the dismissal of faculty members and by condemning their targeted harassment and intimidation." According to the AAUP's "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities":

When ignorance or ill will threatens the institution or any part of it, the governing board must be available for support. In grave crises it will be expected to serve as a champion. Although the action to be taken by it will usually be on behalf of the president, the faculty, or the student body, the board should make clear that the protection it offers to an individual or a group is, in fact, a fundamental defense of the vested interests of society in the educational institution.

Clearly, faculty and student academic freedom as well as their safety are threatened by the efforts of TPUSA and the Professor Watchlist.

Although we welcome the recent decision to announce that surreptitious taping of classes is not allowed on campus—a policy now noted in the *Student Handbook*—we would like to see a clear statement from the University's leadership on both the importance of academic freedom as a core value of the institution, as well as the threat to that freedom and faculty safety represented by efforts such as the Professor Watchlist.

We would like to open a dialogue with your office on these concerns—a dialogue that we hope will lead to a statement by the Board of Trustees reaffirming the University's commitment to academic freedom.

Sincerely,

Robert Numan  
Santa Clara Chapter President

