

IUB-AAUP 2024-2025: Why Join the AAUP Now?

Academic Freedom and Job Security

Why do university faculty and academic professionals around the US expect that campus administrators will value academic freedom, job protections, tenure, and shared campus governance? One key reason: over the last century, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has established and protected all these basic features of academic life. The AAUP has developed the standards and procedures that maintain quality in education and academic freedom in this country's colleges and universities. And the AAUP, its chapters and members, have worked to promote the economic security of faculty, academic professionals, graduate workers, postdoctoral fellows, and all those engaged in teaching and research in higher education as it has worked to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.

But these principles are under attack today. Here at IU, this attack on fundamental professional values and standards for higher education is being pursued on multiple fronts as the administration increasingly centralizes its authority within a corporate structure of governance.

The AAUP-IUB chapter has written about many of these threats, including in the Fall 2024 AAUP Report and in our Current Issues series on IU's "expressive activities" policy, among others. The administration's actions also have been covered extensively in local and national media. Here we focus on only three examples that threaten academic freedom, our job security, and the future of the university we have known.

1) The Whitten administration's current position on the legal status of the campus and university policies that govern academic personnel, which essentially asserts that academic personnel do not have a contract. This position was clearly illustrated in the 2021 termination of a tenured Professor of Communication at IU Northwest, Mark McPhail. McPhail was abruptly banned from the IU Northwest campus and subsequently terminated. He sued IU and claimed his right to due process under IU academic personnel policies. IU argued that because academic personnel policies are posted online with a disclaimer that asserts IU policies create no contracts or rights, IU has no obligation to honor its academic personnel policies, except in cases where individual contracts specify policies included in their terms. Indiana courts agreed. Job security and the academic freedom that it allows is now at the disposal of the administration.

2) The Whitten administration's approach to policy creation and shared governance. While we could cite many instances of the administration's evasion of shared governance and unilateral policy creation, the new IU policy on expressive action (UA-10) is an obvious choice. UA-10 replaces the former expansive Dunn Meadow policy with lengthy, detailed, and restrictive rules governing free speech expression on all IU campuses. It creates a web of potential rule violations and specifies consequences of immediate sanctions, including arrest and termination. Under the name of "time, place, and manner" restrictions to free speech expression, it imposes a regime that makes free speech a high-risk activity for faculty, students, and staff.

3) The Whitten administration's violations of due process to achieve an intended personnel result. The 2023 sanctioning of a tenured Associate Professor of Political Science at IUB, Abdulkader Sinno, is a case study in the impact these changes of administrative practice have had. When a student organization he advised went forward with a planned campus speaking event after failing to be able to satisfy pre-clearance rules, the IU Superintendent for Public Safety was waiting at the scene to observe and immediately report the breach of rules. Following the advice of General Counsel, the administration declined to follow established due process procedures and refer the complaint to the Faculty Misconduct

Review Board, choosing instead to reinterpret them in a way that bypassed required faculty involvement before imposing severe sanctions. Although the Faculty Review Board was ultimately permitted to consider Sinno's appeal after the sanctions were imposed, its recommendation that the sanctions be withdrawn and established procedure followed was rejected. Moreover, the report of the Board revealed that the administration had egregiously violated procedure by secretly submitting a "confidential dossier" on Sinno involving prior events, suggesting that the entire series of events, beginning with flagging an ordinary room reservation for a procedural violation, was an example of weaponizing policy to sanction a faculty member disfavored by the administration. Although the IUB-AAUP filed a complaint of this violation, there is no evidence that administrators who violated the Board's due process procedures have faced any consequences. There is no way for academic freedom and shared governance can survive if this type of conduct is accepted as the norm at IU.

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We deserve better, and our students deserve better. One way to fight against the many threats to the university is to work together to protect the fundamental values of higher education here on campus and nationally. We need to restore an appropriate balance between IU's administrative and business needs and the core of the university: its academic mission and values. We need policy and practice to be guided by academically-oriented administrators and faculty leaders, not an Office of General Counsel oriented towards workforce control. We need open lines to the Board of Trustees and its members, so that those directly entrusted by the state of Indiana with the responsibility to guide the university can establish ties to the academic perspective of its campuses.

If you are not already a member, we encourage you to join your colleagues in the AAUP and become a part of higher education's most influential voice. Each new member strengthens our faculty voice on campus and across the state and nation. And, if you already are a member, we encourage you to invite your colleagues to join. When times are stable the value of chapter membership may seem less obvious to colleagues. But these are not stable times.

The Bloomington AAUP chapter was established in 1919 and has been pursuing its mission to defend academic freedom and due process, to support shared governance, and to promote the economic wellbeing of the profession for over a century. The Bloomington AAUP was active in the creation of the BFC in 1947 and the chapter has continued to serve as a complement to faculty governance, with a broader mission and greater freedom, but sharing the values that guide the BFC. And we work with other organizations on campus, in Indiana, and the U.S. sharing these same values. The members of the chapter's Committee on Academic Freedom are experienced in representing colleagues who encounter adverse personnel actions, regardless of their AAUP membership status.

Our local chapter has grown fifty percent in 2024 alone, but we need to expand much further to be a collective voice that the administration understands it cannot ignore without consequences. To push back against the challenges that academic freedom and shared governance face here at IU now, we must build a broad-based and active chapter, with an expanded group of committed, engaged members who contribute ideas and join the effort.

The AAUP is a membership group, an affiliate of a national organization that works with and supports us and our colleagues throughout the U.S. There are dues and volunteers need to shoulder the work of pursuing the chapter mission. The Bloomington AAUP welcomes colleagues—tenure track, non-tenure-track, emeriti, clinical and research faculty, graduate workers, and other academic appointees—from all schools and disciplines. We accommodate many divergent viewpoints, but share a common commitment to academic freedom, due process, shared governance, and the security and welfare of the profession. AAUP membership is about meeting our own needs and the collective effort to uphold professional and academic principles for the next generation and the common good.