

**Responses to Charges Conveyed to Me by
Dean O. Popp, Associate Vice President for Faculty Affairs
at 11 a.m., Tuesday, April 11, 2000**

Summary: This meeting was held in the presence of Jai Ghorpade, my union representative. I was initially told that Women's Studies Department Chair Susan Cayleff and College of Arts and Letters Dean Paul Strand were to be present as well, but after I sought union representation, I was informed that they would not be present after all. Associate Vice President Dean Popp stated at the time of the meeting that he had recommended to Susan Cayleff and Paul Strand that he meet with me without them. Their absence remained puzzling to me, however, as it was my understanding that they (or at least Paul Strand) were the ones who had called the meeting.

I wish to note for the record that I had sent an email and placed several calls to Paul Strand's office on Thursday, April 6, 2000, because I believed that the Chair had retaliated against me the day before by changing my fall teaching schedule. I subsequently learned that on the same day my schedule was changed, the Chair also held an unofficial and "off-the-record" faculty meeting (after the "official" faculty meeting had adjourned) for the sole purpose of lobbying my colleagues for permission to bring the charges detailed in this document against me.

On Thursday, April 6th and Friday, April 7th, I repeatedly requested a meeting with Paul Strand to discuss what I believed to be the Chair's retaliatory action. Paul Strand never did get back to me regarding my complaint against the Chair. However, after repeated attempts to talk with him about the Chair's actions against me, I was informed by his secretary on Friday, April 7th that I was to meet with him, Susan Cayleff, and Dean Popp in the latter's office on Tuesday, April 11th. After several phone calls to decipher the intent of the meeting, I was informed by Dean Popp's secretary that the meeting would address my "professional relationship to the department."

When Jai Ghorpade and I met with Dean Popp on April 11th, the latter verbally shared six charges that had been brought against me by my department chair, supposedly on behalf of all the tenured faculty in the department. Although I received nothing in writing, I took notes to capture the substantive issues raised in the charges. The charges and my responses to them follow.

ALLEGATION I: As a consequence of becoming "enraged" with the department, I tried to "sabotage" the Pacific Women's Studies Association Conference by acting on my own to set up a reception for keynote speaker Elizabeth Martinez. [The words "enraged" and "sabotage" were used by Dean Popp, and, therefore, I presume, by Susan Cayleff.] In so doing, I embarrassed and inconvenienced another department chair, Richard Griswold, who had volunteered to host the event. Moreover, I attempted to deprive graduate students who had planned and organized the conference the privilege of driving the keynote speaker from the airport. I essentially "told" them that I would pick the speaker up.

RESPONSE: I have never been “enraged” with the department, nor have I ever attempted to “sabotage” a Women’s Studies event or any other event. The idea for the reception came from Richard Griswold (see Exhibit I: email from Richard Griswold dated Monday, April 3rd, 9:45 a.m.). I assume he shared his idea for the reception with me because Elizabeth is a mutual friend and someone with whom I have been working closely for the past year (see Exhibit II: letter from Elizabeth Martinez dated May 9, 2000).

My only role regarding the proposed reception, other than offering to provide some hors d’oeuvres, was to make sure that it would not conflict with anything that had already been planned for Elizabeth. To this end, I consulted with Ceylon Cemali, a first year graduate student who had been delegated primary responsibility for planning and organizing the conference and who sent out most of the communications regarding conference activities (see Exhibit III: Emails from Ceylon re: PWSA). [I also made several attempts to touch bases with the Chair, but she did not come into the office until after 2:30. I felt that time was of the essence since I was going out of town Wednesday for a conference and Richard wanted the reception to take place that Friday.] Ceylon assured me that the only thing planned for Elizabeth on Friday, April 7th was a 7 p.m. dinner at Antique Row Café and that the reception would not pose any problems. Moreover, I did not tell Ceylon that I would pick Elizabeth up at the airport. I merely offered to do so, as I believe is evidenced by Ceylon’s subsequent e-mail asking, “Professor Washington, did you decide to pick up Elizabeth Martinez?” (see Exhibit IV: email from Ceylon Cemali, dated April 3rd, 12:14 p.m.).

As for embarrassing or inconveniencing Richard Griswold, the idea for the reception originated with him. If he was inconvenienced or embarrassed, it was more likely due to the reactions of the Chair than any action on my part. The Chair called me into her office late in the afternoon of April 3rd to accuse me of trying to “jump in on the conference at the last minute” and ordered me to have no contact with Elizabeth when she arrived. She berated me loudly for over half an hour in her office with her door open so that graduate students and faculty colleagues could hear. I believe that Bonnie Zimmerman and Barbara Shaver were in their offices with their doors open during the time that the Chair was loudly admonishing me, but I do not know whether they will confirm my account of her behavior. I was also acutely aware that Richard Griswold passed by the office several times. It must have been very clear to him that I was being berated about the proposed reception because he came to my office early the next morning and asked, “Whose toes did we step on?” He then went down to the Chair’s office to try to explain the situation, only to have the Chair talk him into canceling the reception, with the proviso that Elizabeth should never know Women’s Studies’ role in the cancellation.

ALLEGATION II: I refused to teach the schedule that was assigned to me for fall 2000 because it was not the schedule I wanted to teach.

RESPONSE: This allegation is false. I did not refuse to teach my assigned schedule. I questioned (and still question) why the Chair decided to give me a less desirable schedule

than we had previously agreed on. I also questioned (and still question) why the Chair withdrew her promise to ensure that all three sections would be scheduled for Smart Classrooms. Since the Chair changed my schedule and room assignments two days after berating me about the Martinez reception and one day after persuading Richard Griswold to cancel the reception, I believe that the changes in my schedule and room assignments were retaliatory.

Background on Initially Agreed-Upon Teaching Schedule for Fall 2000: I have been asking for the past three years to teach one of the required graduate student courses, and I have been given a different reason each year as to why I cannot. This year, the Chair denied my request because (1) several of the full professors “would be retiring soon and wanted to keep teaching ‘their’ courses,” and (2) Paul Strand wanted me to teach 3 sections of “Sex, Power and Politics” (WMSTD 375) because it is a GE course, and GE courses are where the Women’s Studies Department has the highest enrollments. The Chair added that by doing what the Dean wanted, I would be doing the department a “big favor.” Moreover, the Chair told me that my Smart Classroom and Electronic Blackboard activities put me “on the cutting edge” of teaching technology and that I should start looking at ways to develop “Sex, Power & Politics” as a Distance Learning Course. Because I was “on the cutting edge” and doing the department such a “big favor,” the Chair guaranteed that I would have Smart Classrooms for all 3 sections of the “Sex, Power & Politics” course I was scheduled to teach for Fall 2000. In fact, she handed me my fall 2000 teaching schedule and Smart Classroom assignments at the conclusion of our conversation (see Exhibit V: Original Teaching Schedule and Classroom Assignments).

Background on Schedule Change:

On Wednesday, April 5th (two days after I was berated for my role in the aborted Martinez reception) I was informed via email from the Chair’s administrative coordinator (Teddi Brock) that my “sections for Fall have gotten all messed up” and I would not be assigned all Smart Classrooms after all (see Exhibit VI: email from Teddi Brock, dated April 5, 2000).

Background on Perceived Pattern of Retaliation:

My belief that the schedule and room changes were an act of retaliation is based on the fact that I was told of these changes two days after the Chair berated me for my part in the aborted Martinez reception. As previously noted, on the very same day that she changed my schedule and room assignments (Wednesday, April 5th), the Chair also held an “off-the-record” faculty meeting (after the official faculty meeting had adjourned) for the sole purpose of lobbying my colleagues for permission to bring these charges against me. I believe that the changes in my teaching schedule and the actions taken against me in the “unofficial” faculty meeting were both driven by the Chair’s desire to “punish” me for agreeing to help Richard Griswold with the reception.

My belief that the Chair’s present actions against me are retaliatory is also based on her having taken similar actions against me in the past when I have done something to displease her. For instance, in the past year alone, the Chair has:

- Mandated that I get professional counseling because I had challenged unfair practices being used to eliminate a highly qualified graduate student of color from consideration for a teaching assignment that the Chair wanted to go to an unqualified White graduate student. The Chair accused me of being “uncollegial” and “too fixated on rules” (her exact words).
- Stated “for the record” that as Chair she considered my abstention from an otherwise unanimous department vote to be “uncollegial” (again, her words). The vote was on a motion to co-mingle department funds with those of a non-profit organization whose board is headed by the Chair’s domestic partner. Incidentally, in the interest of collegiality, I did not articulate my reason for abstaining.
- Told me on several occasions, including in a letter copied to this year’s RTP committee, that I needed to do more departmental service—this despite my being told at the college and university levels that I need to cut back on service. Within weeks of my receiving the Chair’s RTP letter, the Chair announced in a departmental meeting that her bottom line for making teaching assignments was to give preferred teaching schedules as rewards for departmental service. Given her obvious displeasure at my not doing “enough” service for the department, I could not help seeing her bottom line as a threat of retaliation.

Since I believed (and still believe) that the Chair was changing my schedule and taking the Smart Classrooms away from me out of anger over the Martinez reception, I attempted to delay the implementation of the new schedule and seek Dean Strand’s assistance by sending what I perceived to be a very polite, almost conciliatory, response to Teddi Brock (with copies to the Chair and Dean Strand). As the following excerpt from my email reply demonstrates, I did not refuse to teach my assigned schedule. I merely explained how the original schedule had been negotiated and asked whether—given the apparent fluidity of the process—we could “go back to the drawing board”:

“...if I can’t have all Smart classrooms and the agreed upon teaching schedule, I would love to go back to the drawing board on what classes I teach next semester, if possible. I am going to try to get on Paul Strand’s calendar asap. Could we ask Helen for another day or so—in case Beth can’t give me a meeting time tomorrow? Thanks for your help on this” (see Exhibit VII: Washington’s Email Response to Brock, April 5, 2000).

[This, incidentally is the message that allegedly reduced Teddi to tears for four hours and resulted in the office being closed for most of the afternoon.]

For the record, upon receiving my April 5th email indicating that I wanted to discuss the schedule change with the Dean, the Chair left me a voice mail message in which she completely reversed her initial rationale for assigning me 3 sections of “Sex, Power and Politics.” I played a tape of her message in the meeting with Dean Popp and Jai Ghorpade. Following is a word-for-word transcript (copy of tape available on request):

“Pat, it’s Susan. About your schedule: each department is given three Smart classrooms per semester. Pat Huckle teaches in Smart; Mary Kelly teaches in Smart; and you teach in Smart. Teddi did a good job getting you two out of three. She’s still looking for the third. Let me remind you that part of the reason why you were given three sections of 375 was because the 500 level class was so poorly enrolled that it could not be justified offering it again. Another reason was so you would have the opportunity to raise the teaching evaluation scores in the 375 class, which continues to be problematic. I think this is a situation where you might want to think about what might be good for the department as well as yourself in terms of a schedule that was worked at and arrived at after a lot of hard work. And I think it’s also possibly another example where you may have wanted to speak to the Chair of your department before you write the Dean.”

The points made in the Chair’s voice mail message raise some additional concerns for me¹[1], but at this point, I would like to note only that the Chair’s rationale for assigning me all sections of 375 changed drastically from the time we had our initial discussion to the time she left the above voice mail message. The discrepancies between the Chair’s initial and subsequent explanations illustrate to me that her actions in regard to my teaching assignment were inconsistent and even arbitrary.

ALLEGATION III: I was so rude to administrative coordinator Teddi Brock about the changes in my schedule that she was in tears for four hours and the Chair had to close the office during this time so that she could recover.

Response: I did not have a face-to-face conversation with Teddi Brock regarding her email to me (nor did I speak to her by phone about it). In fact, I do not recall having any conversation at all with Teddi on April 6th and 7th. The only communication I had with her regarding the changes in my schedule was the email that appears in Exhibit VII. As noted in my response to Allegation II, I believe that my response to Teddi’s email was “very polite, almost conciliatory.”

ALLEGATION IV: I have told departmental colleagues that I have a lawsuit pending against the department and I am using the threat of the lawsuit to intimidate them.

1[1] For instance, the 500 level class that Susan references is “Women and Violence,” which is taught only in the Spring. Her reference to it in regards to my fall 2000 schedule is irrelevant. Moreover, the Chair’s statement that she decided to assign me 3 sections of 375 so that I could bring up my teaching evaluation scores in “Sex, Power and Politics” appears illogical, as teaching evaluation scores are not based on a cumulative average. The fact is that, historically, I have received my highest teaching evaluation scores in 500 level courses. If there are concerns about my teaching evaluation scores, why give me all sections of 375, which have been historically lower than my scores in 500 level classes? [Incidentally, my teaching evaluation scores in 375 have steadily risen and for my last RTP reporting period were 3.3 and 3.69 (Fall ’98) and 4.0 and 4.1 (Spring ’99)].

Response: This allegation is false. I do not currently have, nor have I had in the past, a lawsuit pending against the department or the university. I have never said to any of my departmental colleagues—nor have I even hinted—that I have a lawsuit pending against the department or the university.

For the record, I did attempt to file a grievance on May 3, 1999 regarding what I perceived as unfair practices, but I shared this information only with the union, a trusted faculty mentor (outside of Women’s Studies), and Paul Strand. If this information got out to Women’s Studies colleagues, it was not through me—and I certainly did not use the information to threaten any of my colleagues.

ALLEGATION V: I display a threatening manner in department meetings. I “holler, scream, and threaten.” My department colleagues are frightened and intimidated by me. They are “concerned about my rage.” Some members of the department refuse to serve on committees with me because of my “style.”

Response: It is difficult, if not impossible, to disprove perceptions—as opposed to specific, factual allegations. However, I deny categorically that I “holler, scream, threaten” (or even raise my voice in anger) during department meetings or on any other occasion.

If any departmental colleague perceives me as threatening and intimidating, I believe that perception is tied at least partly to my being Black. I believe the statement that my colleagues are “concerned about my rage,” like the allegation about the Martinez reception, is part of a larger pattern aimed at depicting me as irrational, out of control, “dangerous.” This depiction of me as someone from whom my White colleagues need protection is extremely offensive and shamefully racist.

As I wrote in one of the first articles I published upon coming to San Diego State:

“Black and other racialized women who take issue with covert conversations or actions that serve to undermine race or sex equity are often perceived as threatening, intimidating, even ‘militant’ (hooks 1989). If we speak firmly, frankly, and to the point, we may be accused of yelling, even though we have not raised our voices (Lorde 1984). We often run the risk of having White power brokers insinuate—or state outright—that we are not team players in a world where collegiality (especially ours) is, oh, so important to our continuing appointment.... We are well aware that the channels by which we enter majority institutions are jealously guarded so that only the ‘right’ kind of racial-ethnic minority group member may enter. And if lucky enough to *pass* through the narrow portal, we are ever-conscious of the tenuous hold we have on our favored status. Too much rides on who sees us as too visible, too arrogant, too

‘inappropriately’ Black, too vocal, too lacking in deference (hooks 1989; Williams 1991).”^{2[2]}

I have no doubt that I have disturbed the status quo of the Women’s Studies Department by calling into question departmental norms that dictate that we should all “go along to get along.” For instance, when I first arrived in the department, graduate students were selected for teaching assignments without reference to any formalized process. When I raised the suggestion of having an open process that would allow all qualified interested students to apply for teaching positions (as opposed to having a select few handpicked by one or two faculty), one of my senior colleagues asked if I really thought the then-current process was unfair, while another stated her belief that it was unhealthy to have students compete with each other. A couple of years later, when guidelines for TA selection had ostensibly been implemented, I was counseled by yet another departmental colleague to go along with the department chair’s recommendation (even though it violated the guidelines) because it was “vital that we support her and avoid frustrating her, especially since her mother has health issues.” As demonstrated by the current formal complaint from Women’s Studies graduate students, there are still issues regarding a fair and impartial TA selection process.

ALLEGATION VI: The Chair was asked by the all of the tenured Women’s Studies faculty to go talk to Associate Vice President Popp because they were frightened and intimidated by me.

Response: It is my understanding that the Chair went to the senior faculty with complaints about me, not vice versa. It is also my understanding that the Chair did not have the full support of the senior faculty in bringing charges against me.

Be that as it may, saying that I frighten and intimidate senior colleagues obscures and distorts the very huge, very real power differential between junior and senior faculty. I think perhaps the issue is not so much that I frighten and intimidate my senior colleagues as it is that I am seen by (some of) them as being “too visible, too arrogant, too ‘inappropriately’ Black, too vocal, too lacking in deference” (see Exhibit VIII: Email from Espin to Washington). This may be a tactical error on my part, but it does not warrant poisoning my reputation and destroying my career by depicting me as someone who poses a threat or danger to others.

Conclusion and Request for a Prompt and Thorough Investigation: I deny each of these charges. I see them as part of an ongoing pattern of harassment and retaliation designed to force me out of the department. The harassment and retaliation began the second semester of my first year at San Diego State University and has increased in level and frequency as I have gotten closer to going up for tenure. I believe that these charges in particular are designed to poison my reputation and set the stage for denying me tenure

^{2[2]} “‘First, You Got to Use What’s Lying Around the House’: Some Personal Reflections on Affirmative Action and White Feminism,” *NWSA Journal*, Volume 10, Number 3, Fall 1998

on the basis of innuendo and unsubstantiated allegations, rather than the protocol outlined in the RTP process. Not only is my reputation being poisoned, but my livelihood and my career are being jeopardized by these charges. Therefore, I request a thorough, complete and objective investigation with a written response provided to me regarding the merit of each of these charges. I also request that a trained and objective mediator meet together with me and my departmental colleagues in an effort to uncover and resolve underlying issues.

Pat Washington

Date