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Department Personnel Committee
 Department of Women's Studies
 San Diego State University
 5500 Campanile Drive
 San Diego CA 92182-8138

Re: Your decision not to grant tenure or promotion
 to Prof. Pat Washington

Dear Members of the Women's Studies Department Personnel Committee:

I send this letter with a heart saddened at its necessity and yet hopeful that you may be willing to hear, to acknowledge what needs to be redressed, and to redress it.

Summary: You have failed to address differences in perceptions of racism, a task required of the field of women's studies in its efforts to deal equitably with differences. You have divided knowing into "research-based" and "action-based," ("service") thus creating a binary that fails to evaluate knowledge produced and used in actions seeking social justice as worthy of tenure and promotion in the field of women's studies.

I have carefully read your letter of refusal of tenure and promotion to Prof. Pat Washington and her letter of rebuttal.

To an outsider looking at the documents, your decision seems to have been motivated by anger at Prof. Washington's having asserted that she had been discriminated against on racial grounds. That anger is reflected in your letter of refusal in the mention of her lack of "collegiality," a criterion Prof. Washington's rebuttal letter points out your provost has publicly noted is not a legitimate standard for tenure review. To an outside reader, your inclusion of the issue of "collegiality," even though it is not a legal criterion for refusal of tenure, signals that interpersonal relations lie at the base of your letter of refusal.

Your letter documents what you term lack of "collegiality" in Prof. Washington's having been, "for most of last year . . . absent from department meetings." Your letter does not acknowledge the exchange that Prof. Washington states took place during a meeting on May 15th, 2000, during which she felt "mocked and ridiculed" for "complaining of racial discrimination." According to her letter of rebuttal, Prof. Washington subsequently, Sept. 25, 2000, wrote Dean Strand about her concern that neither the chair of the department nor three of the faculty evaluators of her application for tenure and promotion could be "objective." The strained personal relations apparently continued unresolved.

Your women's studies department appears to have been faced with a critical task for women's studies as a field, that is, *with finding a way to address differences in perceptions of racism*. Refusing tenure to a colleague when communication over what constitutes racism has broken down is not a solution; rather, it is an institutionalization of racism arising from failures in interpersonal relations. These failures are rooted, I believe, in an inadequate commitment to the idea voiced so profoundly by Audre Lorde that conflict needs to be endured for creative movement forward. The determination of women's studies to be a birthing place of transformed racial relations is measured by ways of resolving conflicts such as differing perceptions of racism. Given this history concerning Prof. Washington's claims of racial discrimination and the responses to that claim, your refusal of tenure and promotion to her on the grounds you have put forward is evidence, I deeply regret to say, that women's studies professionals have once again dealt with difference by shutting it out.

As an academic practitioner of women's studies, I am also disturbed by the grounds you have put forward. Your letter makes clear your priorities in granting tenure and promotion: they privilege "research" over "service." You state: "... the department's primary consideration in evaluating professional growth is publications based on original research" You later acknowledge that in all areas other than department meetings, Prof. Washington's record with regard to "service" is exemplary: "You have distinguished yourself through your service to the university, the discipline, and the wider community."¹

The weight you give to "research" versus the weight you give to "service" calls for analysis. Consider the description you, yourselves, write of Prof. Washington's contributions to "the university, the discipline, and the wider community":

At the level of the university, your work with community-based service learning is particularly noteworthy. You have made numerous contributions to the SDSU Center for Community-Based Service Learning, which have earned you a Malcolm A. Love Aztec Achievement Award.

Your service to the discipline of Women's Studies is also commendable. Your leadership has invigorated the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) Women of Color Caucus. One tangible outcome of this leadership is your work as lead editor for a set of articles collectively titled "Women of Color

¹ I do not mean to imply that Prof. Washington's record with regard to publications does not meet your standards. In her letter of rebuttal, she lists five articles that she has had published in "refereed journals" and three "scholarly peer-reviewed articles" that have appeared in books. She notes that her renewal letter of 1997 advised that "You should work toward the goal of having a minimum of three quality refereed articles accepted for publication as part of a balanced overall record of professional activity, before your review for tenure and promotion." Prof. Washington cites Policy File III-D-1, 4.0 to indicate that criteria for granting tenure and promotion can not be changed once the process is in progress: "Once the evaluation process has begun, there shall be no changes in criteria and procedures used to evaluate the faculty member during the evaluation process." Judging from the written documents, unless members of the committee wish to argue that her articles, almost all of which deal with issues of diversity, lack "quality," Prof. Washington met and exceeded the required publication standards of the department.

Standpoints” published in the *NWSA Journal*. You have also served as a review for disciplinary journals. We commend your valuable service to the discipline.

You have also used your professional expertise to serve the wider San Diego community. In particular, you have served as the vice-chair of the Lesbian and Gay Funding Partnership of the San Diego Foundation and have received a San Diego Lesbian and Gay Pride Community Service Award in 2001. We applaud your active leadership role in the San Diego community.

[We note] the faculty/student exchange program between SDSU and ENLIVA, a women’s non-state educational institution in Minsk, which you played a lead role in establishing. We congratulate you on this accomplishment, and we hope that in the future SDSU students will benefit from this exciting program.

Laudatory as those paragraphs are, they do not capture the extensive concrete specifics of Prof. Washington’s contributions. Prof. Washington’s CV contains two pages of official public acknowledgments for “service” in the form of grants, awards, or ceremonies, from groups as various as Dean Joyce Gattas Awards for Faculty/Student Mentoring Program, the Jane and John Adams Humanities Minigrant for the Tecate, Mexico Orphanage Project, the Woman of Achievement Award from the Business and Professional Women of San Orco District, and the U.S. Department of State’s Speaker and Specialist Grant for Gender and Cultural Studies Programs for Minsk, Belarus. The weight of this record as summarized in your own paragraphs of praise makes your dismissal of it because Prof. Washington’s attendance at department meetings was “sporadic” unintelligible.

More fundamentally, however, your weighting of “research” over what you term “service” points to an institutional bias in academia against knowledge produced and used in social action. It is not at all clear, for example, why work such as editing articles on “Women of Color Standpoints” has been categorized as “Service” rather than as “Professional Growth.” This division seems to indicate a binary between knowledge produced while seeking or in order to seek social change and knowledge produced with no apparent regard to social effects. Progressive feminists have insisted that women’s studies seeks a world in which differences are used to enrich societies rather than as an excuse for privileging some while oppressing others. Women’s Studies presumably has adopted this priority as a fundamental basis of its *raison d’etre*.

Yet a department such as yours is now on public record that a faculty member of color who has made significant contributions to the university, the field, and the wider community, including the international community, contributions focusing on helping society and the field of women’s studies deal more equitably and creatively with differences, has not demonstrated adequate professional development for tenure and promotion.

Look at the titles of Prof. Washington’s published work: “Disclosure Patterns of Black Female Sexual Assault Survivors;” “Who Gets to Drink from the Fountain of Freedom?: Homophobia Within Communities of Color;” “From College Classroom to Community Action;” “First, You Got to Use What’s Lying Around the House’: Some Personal Reflections on Affirmative Action and White Feminism;” “Women’s Studies and Community-Based Service Learning: A Natural Affinity;” “Teaching for Change and Teaching to Change;” and “Actively Engaging the Other: Teaching About Diversity

Through Community-Based Service Learning.” Clearly Professor Washington’s scholarly endeavors focus on obtaining and using knowledge that helps the victimized and fosters social responsibility and equality. You claim in your letter of refusal of tenure and promotion that Prof Washington’s scholarly output does not meet your standard of “publications based on original research.” On what grounds do you judge Prof. Washington’s knowledge-production as *not* original research? Your letter assumes that “original research” is self-explanatory and excludes what Prof. Washington has done. Your letter, for example, mentions that her article “From College Classroom to Community Action” results from her work in a course and its community-service project. That, apparently, you do not consider “original research” although it is not clear why. Your letter further assumes that “original research” is inevitably valuable. “Original research” can be and has been dedicated to oppressive ends. The lack of a clear statement in your application of this standard spelling out an expectation that all “original research” would be evaluated in terms of its potential effects on society again testifies to a binary in your thinking separating knowing and doing.

I am arguing that a kind of knowing arises from doing. It is an ivory-tower tradition in the service of maintaining the power relations of the status quo and a devaluation of experience as a grounds of evidence that judge this kind of knowledge as inferior. Guessing, because you do not clarify, that by “research” you mean controlling variables and using statistical methods of evaluation, I am countering that experience carefully reflected upon can also qualify as a kind of research. Given the social goals of women’s studies, knowledge acquired through the kinds of social action represented in Prof. Washington’s work deserves to be evaluated as worthy of tenure and promotion.

In other words, I believe that women’s studies departments, as part of their efforts to model how to deal equitably with differences, ought to evaluate knowledge produced through and used in efforts to protect and harvest rather than oppress difference as worthy of tenure and promotion. Such a policy would demonstrate commitment in the field of women’s studies to deinstitutionalizing racism.

Although there are many grounds for doing so, I ask you to reverse your position with regard to Prof. Washington’s receiving tenure and promotion through re-evaluating your estimation of what you call “service” and what you call “professional growth,” and through re-evaluating what you define as “research.” I ask you to address differences in perceptions of racism that will allow conflicts to be explored and finally lived through in ways creative of community. I ask that you undertake these changes publicly to help make credible an image of women’s studies as a field dedicated to seeking social justice.

Sincerely,

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