

Committee on the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers

2016–2017 Membership

Judith Lichtenberg, chair (2017)

Scott A. Anderson, associate chair (2017)

Natalie Nenadic (2017)

Jacqueline Taylor (2017)

Heimir Geirsson (2018)

Connie Rosati (2018)

Marcy P. Lascano (2019)

Timothy C. Shiell (2019)

Amy Kind, *ex officio* (2017)

Andrea C. Westlund, *ex officio* (2018)

Jennifer Whiting, *ex officio* (2019)

2016-17 Report of the Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers

Submitted by Judith Lichtenberg, Chair, 2014-17
September 24, 2017

Only two requests for assistance came to the committee this year.

There was continuing communication between a newly-minted PhD who first contacted me in July 2016. She had been teaching on a non-tenure line position (renewed each year) for several years at a public university in the South. Her most important complaint was that she had not been compensated, as she believed she should have been, for several courses she developed for the university. She also had not received a renewal contract until the day before the new contract was set to begin. At least some of her complaints seem to be warranted. The committee carefully reviewed her case and requested further information from her and from administrators at the university. She quit her post at the end of June 2016, which gave her less leverage against the university. The complainant and I had a great deal of correspondence over the year, although there were often significant time lapses, partly due to delays in the administration's turning over requested documents. Unfortunately, no conclusion or settlement had been reached by the end of my term, and the matter has now been turned over to Scott Anderson, the new chair of the committee. There are at this point many documents, some very long, and I'm not optimistic about a resolution. The complainant may have given up.

The committee also received a complaint in the spring from two philosophers teaching at a university in one of the former Soviet republics. They described "poor administrative organization, lack of payment transparency, systematic under-reimbursement, professional incompetence, autocratic management, and straightforward deception," as well as "incompetence and unprofessional behavior" on the part of one of their supervisors. Their complaints sounded plausible. I explained to them that the committee doesn't have the ability to investigate such matters independently, and that the problem is of course compounded when the university in question is not in the US and is remote from the places where most academic philosophy takes place and where most of us have connections.

It turned out that *Jobs for Philosophers*, in an ad by the university, included a link to a statement from one of the complainants. That seemed as good a warning as one could hope for about the situation. It didn't, of course, help the two complainants, but at least others would be alerted to their experience and the university might suffer some repercussions for its actions.

Having chaired this committee for three years, I still find it difficult to understand exactly what it can and can't, should and shouldn't, do. The fact that when a complainant seeks any sort of other remedy (whether through the law, the AAUP, or the university's own grievance procedure—if I understand all this correctly) our committee can no longer take action makes it difficult to know what we should be doing or how to advise complainants in many cases. The most important achievement during my tenure as chair (perhaps the only matter that was carried out from start to finish) was *undoing* the censure the committee had imposed on the University of Houston years earlier. But I spent many hours working through several other cases (such as the

first one described in this report) that were never resolved; other members of the committee also put in significant time on a number of cases. I don't mean to grumble (I'm honored to have been asked to fill this position), but it would help if the APA could think through what it means by "the professional rights of philosophers" and state the charge of the committee more clearly, for the sake of future members who are asked to invest significant time investigating these cases, as well as those who approach the committee in the belief that they have been mistreated.