

Statement from the Faculty Assembly On the Dismissal of Dr. Stephen J. McKenna

On December 13, 2018 the Catholic University of America community received a University communication from President John Garvey on the dismissal of Dr. Stephen J. McKenna, a tenured Associate Professor of Media Studies, for violation of the University's Sexual Offenses Policy, which "prohibits dating or sexual relationships between supervisors and subordinates." The communication outlined both the case and the process followed.

Though the Faculty Handbook lists a variety of lesser sanctions available for such an infraction of the above policy, including warnings and suspension, President Garvey chose to pursue dismissal, the most severe among them, and initiated the dismissal action against Dr. McKenna in January 2018. The Faculty Assembly is issuing the following statement to condemn the University's action against a member of the faculty, for the reasons outlined below.

1. The statement from the president is misleading and distorts the facts of the case, as confirmed by Dr. McKenna's attorney. It leads the reader to believe that a complaint against Dr. McKenna had been filed, yet the individual in question filed no complaint against him. Furthermore, it insinuates that she resigned from her job because of the relationship, when, in fact, their relationship flourished for four years after she left the University. The statement implies that the Ad Hoc Hearing Committee recommended dismissal, when, in fact, the committee unanimously supported a lesser sanction.

2. We deplore the public shaming of Dr. McKenna and maligning of his character. The content of the University Communication was more than a neutral notification of fact: it was a public shaming of Dr. McKenna, who is an alumnus and a long-serving, respected faculty member of the School of Arts & Sciences. It was also an abuse of power. In our collective memory of more than four decades at the University, there has never been an incident of such public shaming by our University administrators, even in cases where faculty members were dismissed for more serious violations. The public way in which the statement circulated and was posted to the University website has the potential to put an end to Dr. McKenna's career. Such a lifelong consequential act against Dr. McKenna is unjust, given the facts of the case.

3. Dr. McKenna's dismissal may lead to the suppression of academic freedom and the silencing of public debate on issues of importance to University. It is widely known that Dr. McKenna has been a vocal critic of the University administration over the past several years, in particular regarding the repeated attempts by the administration to dismantle the Media Studies & Communications Department, which Dr. McKenna chaired, and which is one of the largest majors in the University. Finally, Dr. McKenna was a member of the Faculty Assembly Executive Board and, in that capacity, had spoken to the media regarding his concerns about Academic Renewal, University hiring practices, and the University administration. The president's statement – and the public dissemination of that statement – has the potential to intimidate and silence faculty members who would otherwise exercise their academic freedom and free speech rights by publicly voicing their considered opinions of executive decisions and actions.

4. The dismissal of Dr. McKenna and the release of the public statement raise grave concerns about shared governance. Shared governance between the faculty and the administration is essential to the proper functioning of the University. The University administration acted against the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Hearing Committee, which was convened to adjudicate Dr. McKenna's case. The administration's disregard for the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Hearing Committee shows a clear unwillingness to participate in shared faculty governance.

We deplore the University's dissemination of a public statement about Dr. McKenna's dismissal that distorts the facts of the case. We fear that the public dissemination of the statement will silence debate on campus. And we are gravely concerned about the implications of this case for shared faculty governance. Therefore, for the above reasons, the Faculty Assembly condemns the University's action against Dr. McKenna in the strongest possible terms. **Further, we demand that the Administration remove the President's announcement from the University website, as it reflects poorly on the University, and issue an apology to Dr. McKenna and to the University community for publishing this shameful and misleading statement about a member of our community.**