Dr. Johnny Williams, a tenured Black professor at Trinity College and scholar of race and racism in America, was subject to right-wing threats, including against his life and family, in response to personal posts on social media. Instead of defending him, the administration at Trinity College placed Dr. Williams on involuntary leave. (For more information about this and other cases, as well as responses from AAUP, the Trinity AAUP chapter, and others, please visit the links below.)

We join the Trinity College AAUP, the national AAUP, and additional AAUP chapters and other organizations in finding this case to be of grave concern. It is particularly concerning to our union for at least the following reasons:

1) The Trinity administration’s decision to put Professor Williams on involuntary leave is an attack on academic freedom and scholarly inquiry. As the AAUP letter to Trinity’s president underscores, academic freedom extends to extramural speech and safeguards the rights of faculty to “address the larger community.”

2) The decision of the Trinity administration also undermines the rights of tenure, on which a robust understanding and meaningful exercise of academic freedom depends. If a tenured faculty member with 21 years of service and an exemplary scholarly record can be subject to such discipline, the ability of all faculty, including those without access to tenure, to engage in critical inquiry and public discourse is diminished.

3) Right-wing attacks on faculty have escalated in recent months and distort the statements and scholarly views of the targeted faculty.

4) These attacks have especially singled out faculty of color and faculty whose research, teaching, and advocacy engages with issues of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

We are further concerned that the administration justified putting Dr. Williams on involuntary leave with reference to his own safety. We recognize and appreciate that Dr. Williams’ safety is important, but the administration has substituted paternalism for the vigorous defense of academic freedom that ensures campuses are safe for critical inquiry.

Therefore the United Academics Civil Rights Standing Committee recommends that the United Academics Executive Council endorse the American Association of University Professors’ letter (see the first link below) of June 27, 2017, urging Trinity College President Joanne Berger-Sweeney to reinstate immediately Dr. Johnny Williams to his normal faculty duties. We also ask the Executive Council to share this endorsement with American Association of University Professors, the Trinity AAUP chapter, and Dr. Johnny Williams. We further ask that the Executive Council share this letter and links with the United Academics membership so all UVM faculty can be informed about and prepared for these attacks on faculty, on academic freedom, and on critical inquiry.


https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/06/26/professors-are-often-political-lightning-rods-now-are-facing-new-threats-over-their

http://www.chronicle.com/article/Crashing-the-Academic/240562