

Statement of the Bloomington AAUP Executive Committee Concerning the Sanction of Associate Professor Abdulkader Sinno

Indiana University Bloomington has enjoyed a long tradition of respect and collaboration between faculty and administrators in shared governance. It also has been fortunate to have administrators who generally have honored established policies on matters where the professional rights and duties of faculty were at stake.

Thus, we are dismayed at the decision by Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs Carrie Docherty, in collaboration with the IU General Counsel's office, to impose sanctions on Professor Abdulkader Sinno in violation of clear university and campus policies.

The Vice Provost's violation of policy stemmed from her investigation of Professor Sinno after the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), a student group he advised, invited a speaker to campus for a public event on November 16, 2023. Vice Provost Docherty's accusations against Professor Sinno centered on his alleged failure to follow proper procedures to reserve a room for the event and to arrange for security support. The event ultimately occurred peacefully and without incident. The following day a complaint was lodged against Professor Sinno by Associate Vice President for Public Safety Benjamin Hunter.

Shortly thereafter, Vice Provost Docherty began her investigation, which included an interview with Professor Sinno. In a letter of December 15, 2023, Vice Provost Docherty informed Professor Sinno that he was "prohibited from engaging in any and all teaching responsibilities for the Spring 2024 and Summer 2024 semesters," including "formal and informal teaching, graduate student advising, or student organization faculty advising" and "any and all student-related activities." This precipitous action was taken without regard to the hardship it would cause to Professor Sinno's home academic units, the students who had already enrolled in his classes, and the student group members who looked to him for advising and mentoring.

In purporting to sanction Professor Sinno on her own authority, Vice Provost Docherty acted in violation of clear and longstanding university and campus faculty disciplinary policies. Under [ACA-33](#), Section 5.e., and [BL-ACA-D27](#), she was

required to file a complaint with the Faculty Misconduct Review Committee (FMRC), a standing committee of the Bloomington Faculty Council, which would have held a hearing and made a recommendation to the Provost for or against any sanction. The FMRC process is required when an administrator seeks “severe” sanctions against a faculty member, which are defined in ACA-33 to include “loss of privileges” or “prohibition against participation in certain classes or activities” – precisely the sanction imposed on Professor Sinno.

The AAUP’s executive committee is in a position to speak with authority on the proper understanding of these faculty disciplinary policies, because two of its members, Maurer School of Law professors Steve Sanders and Alex Tanford, participated in writing or revising them. Vice Provost Docherty’s predecessor, Eliza Pavalko, also participated in those processes.

After the policy violation was brought to Vice Provost Docherty’s attention by Professor Sinno’s attorney, IU Senior Associate General Counsel Andrea Newsom reiterated that IU would not rescind the sanctions and would not follow proper procedure.

In addition to the procedural violation, faculty have a strong interest in Professor Sinno’s case being heard by an impartial board, as required by policy. The denial of permission for the public event of November 16 was set in motion on technical grounds through the direct intervention of the Provost, the complaint was lodged by an Associate Vice President who had personally attempted to ensure that the event would not be held, and the Vice Provost’s investigation and decision were undertaken unilaterally. The active intervention of upper administration in these matters makes the established procedure of independent faculty review especially important.

Regrettably, the IU administration here has demonstrated it will simply ignore clear, written policies designed to safeguard due process and academic freedom when it is expedient to do so. This incident should gravely concern every faculty member. The integrity, character, and cherished traditions of our university are at stake. The AAUP Executive Committee calls on the administration to withdraw Professor Sinno’s sanctions and reopen his case by referring the complaint against him to the Faculty Mediation Review Committee, as procedure requires. We ask

the Bloomington Faculty Council to insist that policies of shared governance be properly enforced.