

The PC Police Part 2

On December 17, 2013, [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) offered another report on administrative disciplinary action against Professor Adler. (A comment by the editor of usmnews.net follows the report):

U. of Colorado's Response to a Gritty Lecture Worries Sociologists

By Peter Schmidt

The University of Colorado at Boulder has denied pressuring a tenured sociology professor to retire over student complaints about a classroom skit on prostitution, but it has also made clear that she faces disciplinary action if her efforts to discuss the harsh realities of sex work again arouse fears she has created a hostile environment for students.

Russell L. Moore, the university's provost, said in a statement issued on Monday that the professor, Patricia A. Adler, "is not being forced to retire."

He added, however, that the university has disciplined Ms. Adler, by not letting her teach the course at issue again in the spring, in response to unidentified students' concerns that they had felt pressured to take part in, or were offended by, the skit, which depicted various characters involved with prostitution.

Academic freedom, Mr. Moore said, "does not allow faculty members to violate the university's sexual-harassment policy."

The [controversy over the skit](#), as well as the university's response to it, has triggered widespread concern among sociologists who protest that the university appears focused too much on its legal risks and not enough on academic considerations. Many ask if it is possible to honestly teach about subjects like prostitution without potentially offending some students' sensibilities.

"Discussing controversial subjects is our responsibility. To shy away from doing that just because they are controversial would be doing a disservice to our students," said Jody Clay-Warner, a professor of sociology at the University of Georgia. Ms. Clay-Warner said that she lacked any direct knowledge of the skit staged by Ms. Adler but that "the idea of using a skit in a large classroom is certainly not unusual."

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Sally T. Hillsman, executive officer of the American Sociological Association, said in a

written statement that her group's leadership was "extremely concerned about this matter and is in the process of getting more details to determine what actions might be appropriate."

A 'Culture of Fear'

For her part, Ms. Adler said on Monday that she had not decided if she should accept the university administration's offer of an early-retirement buyout, of two years' salary, or stay and remain exposed to additional charges of misconduct, especially if she defends her teaching methods.

She denied having pressured anyone to take part in the skit or ever having heard students complain about it, and she characterized herself as the victim of overreach by the university's human-resources office.

"There are bigger issues here," Ms. Adler said. A key one, she said, is that the university administration had disciplined her in the absence of any formal investigation or formal sexual-harassment complaint. "Universities," she said, "have become hostage to the culture of fear—fear of lawsuit, fear of accusation, fear of doing too much or too little."

Ms. Adler, who is 62, said she actually had requested, and was denied, an early-retirement buyout this fall, before the controversy over the skit erupted, but now she is tempted to reject the university's new offer to take a stand against how it has treated her. More than 2,000 Colorado students, alumni, and other supporters have signed an online petition urging the university to keep her on.

The Colorado professor, a prominent scholar of deviant subcultures, staged the skit that drew the administration's scrutiny on November 5 as part of her "Deviance in U.S. Society" course. She has offered the course, and featured the skit as part of it, each semester for about 20 years. The course consistently ranks as among the most popular at Boulder, enrolling about 500 students.

The skit depicts figures involved in the sex industry, with the performers—mainly current and former undergraduate teaching assistants—dressing for their respective roles and using raw language to describe their lives. Among the characters are a pimp, a madam, and various types of prostitutes in a status hierarchy that has at the top escort-service workers and descends through "brothel whores," "bar whores," streetwalkers, "crack whores," and "slave whores."

A Monitored Performance

The skit was performed this fall largely as it had been in past semesters, but the audience was slightly different in that it included representatives of the university's Office of Discrimination and Harassment.

In a December 10 memorandum to Ms. Adler, Llen Pomeroy, that office's manager, pointed out three aspects of the performance that were later discussed with Ms. Adler as problematic: a student playing the role of a straight male streetwalker repeatedly used the term "faggot," a student playing a pimp made joking references to how he beats women, and a student portrayed a Latvian "slave whore" in a manner that might have offended students from that nation or other parts of Eastern Europe.

The letter from Ms. Pomeroy acknowledged that her office had not formally investigated the performance because no one had formally complained about it, and that "this is the first time concerns have been raised to our office about your class or the prostitution skit."

Ms. Adler has blamed the controversy surrounding the latest performance of the skit on a single teaching assistant whom she did not identify, but whom she accuses of trying to round up other teaching assistants to informally complain.

Ms. Adler has also accused the sociology department's chairwoman, Joanne Belknap, of having opposed the skit as trivializing the lives of sex workers and violence against women, and having directly said to Ms. Adler that she welcomes the opportunity to push her out.

Ms. Belknap did not respond on Monday to requests for comment, and the university has directed all administrators involved in the controversy to route calls to its public-relations office.

The statement issued by Provost Moore said student teaching assistants who wished not to be publicly identified had "made it clear to administrators that they felt there would be negative consequences for anyone who refused to participate in the skit."

Ms. Adler responded on Monday by saying that participation in the skit "was, and always has been, voluntary," and that her student teaching assistants generally clamor to take part in it and come back to perform, year after year. "The last thing I would want to do is to make my own people feel uncomfortable," she said.

Mark K. Miller, a university spokesman, initially responded to questions raised by Ms. Adler's treatment by suggesting that it might have been best for her to run her skit plans by an institutional review board.

He clarified on Monday that Steven R. Leigh, dean of the university's College of Arts and Sciences, had raised the question of whether it might be appropriate for a review board to pass judgment on such an activity, but the university recognizes that such boards are established to oversee human-subjects research, not teaching.

Comment by Editor of usmnews.net as published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*:

Administrators will stop at nothing to fabricate, misinterpret, or misuse "student concern." Without an opportunity to address accusations, who knows what's going on? Here's what I mean. In a \$2.5+ million failed effort to fire me, among the stunts administrators pulled was to claim a student--only one of the thousands I taught over several decades--had complained that ethics shouldn't part of my accounting courses, and I shouldn't be integrating ethics in their accounting education. (See news reports over the past decades of ethical shenanigans by accountants.) But here's the interesting part about the student accusations:

At the time administrators were fabricating claims to fire me, one of my students pulled me over on the Hwy 98, he was so excited he could not wait to talk to me the next day at school. The student told me what had just happened to him and a friend (also a student in my class). Stephen Jackson, then Interim Director of the School of Accountancy, had offered the students higher grades in my class if they would say something that would discredit me. They refused.

When I reported it to higher administrators, they refused to even consider to investigate Steve Jackson, who, by the way, still teaches at USM. During depositions, we learned that they, too, were actively involved in efforts to fire me. They didn't like my speech. And they didn't stop with students in their efforts to fabricate reasons to fire me. For details, see, "Virginia Tech Danger."

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