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## Today's News

Thursday, April 13, 2000

### Bennington College President Fires a Professor Who Had Openly Criticized Her

 By [ROBIN WILSON](#)

Bennington College has fired a philosophy professor who has been critical of the institution's president, canceling his courses mid-term and informing him that if he speaks publicly about the matter he will be evicted immediately from his campus apartment.

Elizabeth Coleman, Bennington's president, called meetings with faculty members on Tuesday to tell them she had fired Carlin Romano, who has taught at Bennington for five years and who regularly writes for *The Chronicle's* Opinion section. Faculty members said she told them that Mr. Romano's performance had been inadequate. The professors also said that administrators also contend that during a conversation a week earlier, Mr. Romano had threatened to harm the reputation of William Reichblum, the college's dean.

Mr. Romano has refused to comment, but those who have spoken to him say he has denied making any threats and feels that the administration has blown his conversation with Mr. Reichblum out of proportion. In an interview with *The Chronicle* in March, Mr. Romano called on Ms. Coleman to resign. He said she was "a serial violator of academic freedom with no respect for her faculty, no respect for difference of opinion, and a pathologically vindictive personality." Mr. Romano said then that he expected to be fired for his remarks.

In the last year, the contracts of two other professors who questioned some of Ms. Coleman's decisions have not been renewed, and another instructor who criticized

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her has resigned. Faculty members have long accused the president of penalizing those who disagree with her and of trying to eliminate the faculty's role in decision-making. Ms. Coleman first clashed with the faculty back in 1994, when she fired 26 of the college's 79 professors and replaced Bennington's system of tenure with multiyear contracts.

David Rees, a spokesman for the Vermont college, said the idea that Mr. Romano had been fired "because he's been opposing the administration is absolutely absurd." Mr. Rees said he could not comment on the details of the situation, citing the confidentiality of personnel matters. But he told *The Chronicle* last month that administrators informed Mr. Romano in February that he was in danger of losing his job. Mr. Romano has "continually failed to meet his responsibilities to students by not turning in student evaluations when they're due," said Mr. Rees. Bennington issues evaluations instead of grades.

Edward Hoagland, a professor of literature who has spoken to Mr. Romano about what transpired, said Mr. Romano met with Mr. Reichblum, the dean, on April 4 to seek assurances that he would not be fired before his contract expired in June 2001. Mr. Romano, said Mr. Hoagland, had been worried that in retribution for his critical remarks about her, Ms. Coleman would let him go this summer. During their meeting, Mr. Romano is also said to have told Mr. Reichblum that if the college got nasty with him, he would get nasty back.

On Tuesday, Mr. Romano was called into Ms. Coleman's office and told that he had two options: either resign or be fired. Mr. Romano chose the latter.

Elizabeth Sherman, a professor of biology at Bennington, said Mr. Romano deserved to be fired. She said the fact that he has been late finishing student evaluations may sound trivial, but it isn't. "Students' transcripts can't be kept up to date," she said, adding that it does students little good to get feedback about their classroom performance months after the course has ended.

Ms. Sherman said she didn't believe that disagreeing with Ms. Coleman could get a professor fired. "I've had some serious differences with her, and I'm still here," said Ms. Sherman, who has taught at Bennington for 22 years.

Allison Ryan, a Bennington trustee who graduated from the college in 1998, said she was "very disappointed" that the college had fired Mr. Romano in the middle of the term, leaving students in the lurch. The college has canceled two courses Mr. Romano was teaching this semester.

Mr. Romano is the only philosophy instructor on the campus, and some students are upset, as well. "If they replace him with a philosophy instructor of equal quality, I'll stay," said a sophomore who asked to remain anonymous. "But if they don't, I'll probably end up transferring." The student said Mr. Romano had been her mentor since she arrived at Bennington and that he was an excellent teacher.

Faculty members said administrators told Mr. Romano he had until Friday to clean out his office and campus apartment, and warned him that if he talked about the issue publicly, Bennington security guards would remove him from the campus immediately and ship his belongings to him.

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Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [A Trustee's Criticism of Faculty Members Throws Bennington Into a New Period of Turmoil](#) (3/31/2000)
- [Nepotism Angers Bennington Professors](#) (11/19/1999)
- [AAUP Attacks Tenure Policy at Bennington College](#) (1/30/1998)

- [Dismissed Professors Lose a Round in Bennington College Case](#) (9/5/1997)
- [Tenureless Bennington Draws New Faculty Members and Students](#) (1/10/1997)
- [Bennington College Enrollment Plummets in Year After Changes](#) (9/22/1995)



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