University completes six personnel reviews after Wainstein investigation

After a comprehensive process, the University has completed personnel reviews for six employees named in the independent investigation of academic irregularities conducted by Kenneth Wainstein. The University has ended the employment of two additional individuals, permanently restricted one faculty member from future administrative responsibilities, and cleared three other employees.

The review process, led by Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost James W. Dean Jr. and Vice Chancellor for Workforce Strategy, Equity and Engagement Felicia A. Washington, was designed to determine if these employees knowingly participated in or facilitated the irregular courses.

The reviews began after the Oct. 22, 2014, release of Wainstein’s report when Chancellor Carol L. Folt pledged to hold accountable individuals who still worked for the University and were directly implicated in wrongdoing related to the academic irregularities. She said the University had terminated or “would commence disciplinary reviews of nine then-current UNC-Chapel Hill employees. The chancellor also said further review could find those employees had done nothing wrong. And she asked the University’s two top officers responsible for personnel to conduct the process.

After three previous separations since the release of the Wainstein report, six current employees had remained in review status.

Folt invoked her right under state law to disclose the following review results to protect the reputation and integrity of the University:

- Brent Blanton, associate director of the Academic Support Program for Student-Athletes (ASPSA), held an at-will position exempt from the North Carolina Human Resources Act, and his employment was discontinued effective today (Nov. 12). This action was taken in accordance with UNC system and University policies. A copy of his discontinuation letter is available here.

- Travis Gore, administrative assistant in the Department of African, African American and Diaspora Studies, was terminated from that position effective today (Nov. 12). This action was taken in accordance with state law and University policies relating to employees subject to the North Carolina Human Resources Act. A copy of his dismissal letter is available here.

- Roberta (Robbi) Owen, professor of dramatic art and former senior associate dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, is permanently restricted from having any future programmatic or administrative leadership responsibilities at the University. Her faculty employment is not otherwise affected. A copy of her notification letter is available here.

- Three other employees were cleared of wrongdoing: Corey Holliday, associate director of athletics; Alphonse Mutima, lecturer, Department of African, African-American and Diaspora Studies; and Andre’ Williams, associate director of development, Arts and Sciences Foundation, and former director of football student-athlete development. Their notification letters are posted here, here and here.

The reviews considered whether the employees knowingly helped create the circumstances that allowed the irregular courses to be conducted, knowingly directed students to the classes, or were in a position to know about and stop the wrongdoing and failed to do so.

The reviews also considered all available information and facts, including examining relevant records from the pool of an estimated 5 million pages of emails and electronic documents compiled by Wainstein’s law firm for the investigation, as well as interviews with the employees to include additional background and full context.
Wainstein and his team interviewed 126 individuals during an eight-month investigation in 2014. That number at the time included 20 current and former administrators, 15 faculty and staff from the African and African American and Diaspora Studies department (formerly the Department of African and Afro-American Studies), 12 current and former ASPSA staff members, four tutors for student-athletes, and 22 current and former students, including 17 current and former student-athletes.

In launching the reviews, the University used Wainstein’s findings to identify the three following categories of people who may have had knowledge of or directly participated in the irregularities:

- First, a number of people mentioned in the Wainstein report as having potentially played a role – directly or indirectly – were no longer employees.

- Second, the report implicated several individuals, now former employees, as persons who had knowledge of or were responsible for creating and managing the irregular courses. They included Deborah Crowder (retired, 2009), Julius Nyang’oro (retired, 2012; professor emeritus status revoked, 2014), Jan Boxill (resigned, 2015), Tim McMillan (resigned, 2014), Jaimie Lee (terminated from an at-will EPA position in the ASPSA, 2014) and Beth Bridger (separation due to probationary status by UNC-Wilmington on Oct. 22, 2014, and a former ASPSA employee at UNC-Chapel Hill).

- Third, the report mentioned a number of other people as having potentially been involved, but the evidence for their involvement was uncertain. People in this third category were the focus of the six reviews.

Last December, the University agreed to disclose when the reviews were completed, including a decision not to discipline, under a mediated settlement of a lawsuit brought by several North Carolina media organizations.

(http://carolinacommitment.unc.edu/updates/unc-chapel-hill-statement-regarding-personnel-records/)

Today’s disclosure provides additional information beyond what the settlement terms required about the three individuals who were cleared of any wrongdoing. North Carolina laws do not require such disclosure, a fact the settlement confirmed.

UNC-Chapel Hill has three different types of employees, and each category has different policies and procedures for ending their employment. Staff employees subject to the North Carolina Human Resources Act are required to attend a pre-disciplinary conference and have opportunities to appeal their termination. Non-faculty employees exempt from the same act hold at-will appointments that can be discontinued at any time with either appropriate notice or pay in lieu of such notice. Tenured faculty are subject to policies and regulations adopted by the University’s Board of Trustees and approved by the UNC president and the UNC Board of Governors.

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