

By [Kirby Neumann-Rea](#) • Of the News-Register • May 28, 2021 

---

# Linfield won't cooperate in AAUP investigation

Linfield University will not cooperate in a new investigation by a national education organization regarding the firing April 27 of tenured Professor Daniel Pollack-Pelzner.

University officials have also declined to comment on the investigation by American Association of University Professors.

On April 30, AAUP issued a written protest to Linfield President Miles K. Davis over Pollack-Pelzner's firing, and a week later called for the university to reinstate him or face investigation.

Pollack-Pelzner, who had been serving on the college board of trustees, was fired for what the university claimed was insubordinate behavior and “conduct that is harmful to the university.” No hearing or other procedure was held and Pollack-Pelzner learned of his firing while on his Linfield email site and seeing it shut down. Linfield administration is declining to respond to questions about the case.

AAUP informed Linfield administration last week that an investigative committee has been appointed and will begin to arrange its interviews around the end of June, according to Gregory F. Scholtz, Director, AAUP's Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance. AAUP is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization of faculty and other academic professionals that develops standards and procedures that “maintain quality in education and academic freedom,” according to its website.

“This is not terribly common,” said Professor Sharon Glasco of the AAUP decision to investigate. “It has to take some pretty extreme action on the part of a university administration to push the national organization to act in this way,” said Glasco, who teaches history at Linfield and is chair of the university

AAUP chapter. Glasco said the chapter has about 25 members, down from about 40 prior to Linfield's faculty reduction in force in 2019. It is an advocacy chapter; by law, the school faculty cannot form a union chapter since Linfield is a private institution and faculty are barred from unionizing.

“Daniel, and many of my colleagues would agree, represents the best that Linfield has to offer in terms of a student's education,” Glasco said. “He has always acted in a manner to help improve the institution, not to bring it down. He was acting on behalf of our students and trying to make Linfield a safer place for the students. His termination without any kind of due process is a direct threat to health of tenure on our campus, and the fact he was terminated without due process and it appears to me the institution violated its own policies in doing so, that's a dangerous thing.”

The three-member AAUP investigative committee will conduct interviews via teleconference, rather than visiting the campus and community. According to Scholtz, presuming the committee conducts its interviews in July, a draft report could be completed as early as September.

Appointed to the committee are chair Professor Allison Buskirk-Cohen (Psychology) of Delaware Valley University, Professor Rana Jaleel (Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies), University of California Davis, and Professor Brian Turner (Political Science) Randolph–Macon College.

Asked what AAUP heard from the Linfield administration about its willingness to cooperate and participate in the inquiry, Scholtz said that Provost Agre-Kippenhan “wrote on May 17 to decline participation in the investigation. In a (May 24) email, we asked President Davis to reconsider that decision.”

Linfield spokesman Scott Nelson was asked this week if the university plans to cooperate with the investigation. In response, Nelson said the university opted not to add anything to the statement it issued last week on the pending AAUP inquiry, which read, “While we respect the AAUP, this matter is not suitable for resolution through an ad hoc committee of a private, outside organization. It would be unhelpful for us to speculate on what the AAUP may or may not decide it needs to do.”

In the absence of Linfield's involvement, Scholtz said, “the committee may have to depend on other sources, such as public

statements and the president's media interviews, to obtain the administration's perspective. The committee will continue to urge the administration to cooperate so that its position will be fully and fairly represented in the final report. And a copy of the draft text will be sent to the administration with an invitation for comment. Most non-cooperating administrations tend to respond to that invitation. But, obviously, we can't force the administration to participate."

Glasco said, "His termination did not follow the due process that is laid out in the handbook. My understanding is that the investigation is really focusing on the administration violating its own rules." Asked about the university's claim that the faculty handbook was outdated, Glasco replied, "it is not ... the latest update was done in January 2021.

"Chapter 3 talks about the organizational structure of faculty and university and it is true that last fall we shifted from college to university structure," creating the colleges of arts and science, business, and nursing, she noted.

"That chapter does need to be overhauled because it does not represent the university structure. But Chapter 4 deals with all the principles of academic freedom and tenure, hiring and

dismissal of faculty, and in that sense the chapter is not out of date at all,” Glasco said.

“To me it’s very clear that we have clear guidelines in our faculty handbook about the process by which tenured faculty can be terminated,” Glasco said. She stated that cause is one of those reasons, and, despite perceptions, tenured faculty can be terminated but the process needs to be followed. Pollack-Pelzner declined to comment for this article.

Scholtz said that should the investigative committee finish its work at the end of summer, a draft might go to Committee A of Academic Freedom and Tenure at the end of September.

“Committee A will vote on whether the report should eventually be published,” he said. “If the vote is affirmative, it then goes to the principal parties for comment. Then more editing occurs. My hope is that final report will be published in November or early December. But most of the timing will depend on the committee.”

According to the AAUP procedures, the committee is asked to speak to “the parties concerned and others who may possess relevant information or views.”

Procedures call for the committee to look into “AAUP standards alleged to have occurred, into conditions of academic freedom and tenure in the institution that form the background of the particular case(s) or that may have given rise to related incidents, and into relevant subsequent developments. The investigating committee may seek to secure such facts and viewpoints as it may deem necessary for the investigation, through onsite interviews, written documents, or correspondence or interviews both before and after the campus visit. In communications to the institution, the investigating committee should make clear that it acts not in partisanship, but as a professional body charged with ascertaining the facts and respective positions as objectively as possible and as related to applicable Association-supported standards.”

In terms of impacts of the investigation, Glasco said the clearest one is that AAUP could censure the Linfield administration, which means a censure list is publicly available through the AAUP website.

“It doesn’t carry legal ramifications. AAUP does not have that sort of power, but does send a message to prospective faculty where Linfield University is a place where support of academic

freedom is suspect or weak,” Glasco said. “In the realm of academia it is a significant mark.” Currently, 58 institutions are on the AAUP censure list.

“There may be some issues of accreditation. AAUP is a policy organization, which supports colleges and universities in upholding best practices, so it holds a certain amount of stature within the academic community,” she said.