

November 6, 2024

Dr. Pamela Brown, Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, New York City College of Technology

Dear Provost Brown:

I am writing on behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee. Our charge is to defend academic freedom as a professional and contractual right of all CUNY professional staff. Academic freedom is grounded in the faculty or staff member's qualifications for the position as reviewed by his/her peers. It consists of the freedom to teach, research, write, and to speak in our capacity as citizens without restraint by the administration.

Given the contractual right to academic freedom enjoyed by all PSC-CUNY members, we are deeply alarmed to learn of what appears to be an act of direct censorship by New York City College of Technology management. It is our understanding that Marianne Madoré, a Writing Fellow in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at City Tech, submitted a blog post as part of her required work for the program. The post, entitled "To End Zionism and For a Free Palestine: How Do We Do 'Very Effective' Writing?" was published on October 25. On October 28, Professor Madoré reported to the coordinators of the Writing Across the Curriculum program that the post had been removed from the City Tech website (and that the blog itself had become password-protected). She was informed by a coordinator of the Writing Across the Curriculum program that "your recent blog post was taken down, as it was outside the scope of content specified for blog posts in the WAC Fellows Handbook," adding: "This decision was made by college administration. Please reach out to Provost Brown, cc'd on this email, if you have any questions." You confirmed this fact in your email of October 31, writing to Professor Madoré: "Your blog was taken down because it was outside the scope of the assignment content."

This is a very clear and blatant violation of Professor Madoré's contractual right to academic freedom. This right is enshrined in the Preamble to the CUNY contract; I quote in full:

WHEREAS, CUNY and the PSC seek to maintain and encourage, in accordance with law, full freedom of inquiry, teaching, research and publication of results, the parties subscribe to Academic Freedom for faculty members. The principles of Academic Freedom are recognized as applicable to other members of the Instructional Staff, to the extent that their duties include teaching, research and publication of results, the selection of library or other educational materials or the formation of academic policy.

In your email to Professor Madoré, you refer to the guidelines provided for WAC Fellows regarding their required blog posts, but these guidelines merely note: "Possible topics include previous/upcoming workshops, general WAC principles, teaching writing in the classroom, and sample lessons." Professor Madoré's post in fact addresses several of these topics quite directly. Moreover, the language you cite hardly seems binding, and her post is similar in content and

form to many others that have been previously posted by WAC Fellows on the site, which deal with topics such as the political economy of WAC writing practice, the stress involved in writing a dissertation, and the institutional structure of the WAC program itself. As a Professor of English who has myself gone through the WAC certification process, I would add that the flexibility and open-endedness built into such guidelines is absolutely in keeping with the principles of writing across the curriculum, and of writing pedagogy more generally.

Most troubling, Professor Madoré nevertheless has offered to revise her blog post, in order to more directly engage with foundational WAC principles; to illustrate the post with sample lessons or guides to classroom conversations; and/or to locate the argument of the post in contemporary debates about writing pedagogy. This is going above and beyond the requirements of the assignment, since her original post met those requirements. Furthermore, there is no indication that such posts are ordinarily vetted in this way—certainly not by the Provost or others in City Tech management. The lack of response she has received makes it apparent that this is merely an attempt to censor this post due to its content. This is not only a textbook example of an academic freedom violation but a case of direct and rank censorship.

Therefore, we demand that City Tech management reverse this decision, and allow Professor Madoré's original blog post to be put back up on the site where it was originally published. If you feel the blog post needs the revisions that Professor Madoré offered to make in order to meet the assignment requirements, you can accept her offer to make those changes before re-publishing the blog post. Failing either of these remedies, however, we will consider City Tech management to be in violation of Professor Madoré's contractual right to academic freedom, and will proceed accordingly.

I look forward to your immediate and affirmative response to this request. I am available to follow up on any of the points raised in this letter.

PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF THIS EMAIL IN WRITING.

Sincerely,

Anthony Alessandrini, Chair
On behalf of the PSC-CUNY Academic Freedom Committee

cc: Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor, City University of New York
Russell K. Hotzler, President, New York City College of Technology
Professor James Davis, President, Professional Staff Congress
Ari Paul, *Clarion* Editor
Fran Clark, PSC-CUNY Director of Communications
Professor Marianne Madoré