

News and Notes

A Bulletin of the AAUP – Mills College Chapter

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Mills College Lays Off Tenured Faculty

“The Future of Tenure, Academic Freedom, and Shared Governance at Mills”

The summer months at Mills this year have been far from idyllic. On May 16th the Board of Trustees declared a financial emergency. On June 6th, Chinyere Oparah, Provost and Dean of the Faculty notified eleven members of the Mills faculty whose positions had been identified for potential elimination in a draft Financial Stabilization Plan (FSP). The final version of the FSP, approved by the Board on Monday, June 26, recommended eliminating five tenured members of our faculty: Wah Cheng (History), Vivian Chin (Ethnic Studies), Marc Joseph (Philosophy), David Keeports (Physics), and Stephen Ratcliffe (English). The reduction of the

number of impacted positions resulted from retirements, student advocacy, protests by prominent scholars and creative artists from around the world, and pressure from the National Office of the American Association of University Professors. This success notwithstanding, we have still lost five treasured members of the Mills Faculty. In a few short months, we have witnessed a significant challenge to tenure, academic freedom, and shared governance at Mills. This bulletin provides perspectives and background on the changes that began to unfold at Mills this summer.

Assault on Academic Freedom and Tenure

The “financial emergency” declared by the Mills College Board of Trustees did not meet the AAUP procedural standards designed to safeguard tenure and academic freedom under institutional conditions of severe financial distress. These procedures require that “an elected faculty governance body should participate in the decision that such a condition exists . . . and that all feasible alternatives to termination of appointments have been pursued.” In addition, the Mills administration did not follow a crucial procedural standard. “Determining where within the overall academic program termination of appointments may occur, developing criteria for termination of appointments, and selecting individuals whose appointments are to be terminated all involve considerations of educational policy.” Such actions should therefore be the primary responsibility of the faculty or of an appropriate faculty body and not largely a matter of administrative discretion as was recently the case here at Mills.

In a letter, dated 13 June 2017 to President Hillman and Katie Sanborn, Chair of the Mills College Board of Trustees, the national office of the AAUP expressed its concerns regarding Mills’ compliance with the procedural standards set forth in its *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* and stated that it was “compelled to conduct investigations and impose censure” on several institutions which disregarded these standards. Mills has joined a small number of institutions that have challenged the AAUP’s principles of academic freedom and tenure. These institutions are not part of the educational mainstream; and it is ironic that Mills, with its commitment to social justice, not to mention our national and international reputation, may join the ranks of institutions such as Louis University, Felician College, and the College of Saint Rose.

Shared Governance At Mills?

The Mills College Board of Trustees recently approved the Shared Governance Committee’s “Vision of Effective Shared Governance at Mills College,” which captures the spirit underlying the concept of shared governance. However, its so-called “overarching principles”—“respectful and collaborative, “efficient and productive,” “representative and inclusive,” “responsible and accountable,” “valued and cultivated,” and “informed and transparent”— are *qualities* and not *core principles* of shared governance.

Shared governance is dependent upon the principle of “joint effort, ” an approach to participatory decision-making by the constituencies that make up an institution of higher education — governing board, president/administration, faculty, students, and alumnae/i. As articulated in the AAUP’s Statement on Shared Governance, joint effort entails “decision-making participation by all of the institutional components” with the provision that “differences in the weight of each voice, from one point to the next, should be determined by reference to the responsibility of each component for the particular matter at hand.”

The synergies created by an authentic “joint effort” are necessary conditions for Mills to meet the challenges it now faces. Our vision of shared governance needs to articulate this principle (stated in the Faculty Handbook section 1.3) along with definitions of the roles and responsibilities of the College’s constituencies (Faculty Handbook sections 1.4-1.7).

The AHC document refers to the AAUP statement, jointly formulated by the American Association of University Professors, the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). It should also note that the American Council of Education recognized the AAUP statement “as a significant step forward in the clarification of the respective roles of governing boards, faculties, and administrations” and urged members of ACE to adopt it. Shared governance at Mills, a member of the ACE, would improve if the College formerly adopted the AAUP Statement.

Unfortunately, at this point, neither the FSP layoffs, program closures, and faculty “re-deployments,” nor the MillsNext plan and academic restructuring of departments and divisions come close to meeting this standard.

How do the layoffs of tenured faculty square with the Faculty Handbook?

The Mills College Faculty Handbook is essentially a contract agreement between the Mills faculty and the College administration, laying out each party's rights and responsibilities. Like other contracts, it spells out the promises each is expected to fulfill. It is designed to help resolve future disagreements and build trust and encourage cooperation between the two parties. At this moment in time, the College administration has weakened that bond of trust and cooperation through actions that contravene the Handbook.

1. Reasonable Alternatives

The Faculty Handbook (section 2.10.4.2), states, that following a declaration of financial emergency by the Board of Trustees, "the College administration will consider reasonable alternatives to involuntary separation of faculty." The faculty produced a reasonable alternative to the Financial Stabilization Plan's (FSP's) layoffs of tenured faculty. We called it the Alternative Proposal (or AP) and argued that it was more than a reasonable alternative but in fact a superior one. The AP offered greater immediate and permanent savings than the FSP without layoffs. It had the support of the vast majority of faculty, students, alums, and the broader academic community. Unlike the FSP, it has no costs of severance pay, litigation, the loss of tenure as a credible promise to faculty, and probable censure by the AAUP.

In the same section, the handbook also states "the administration reserves the right to determine the appropriateness" of the following actions to deal with a financial emergency: "actions to increase revenues," "leaves without pay," and "reduced appointments." Surveys of Mills faculty show a willingness to take actions in all of these areas. Indeed, the FEC informed the administration about the survey results. Yet, the administration dismissed almost all of the proposed actions from the faculty without so much as a discussion. The rejected proposals included helping in admissions, marketing, and recruitment; taking leaves without pay; switching to part-time employment; considering open gender admissions; and, yes, even taking salary cuts, which many faculty were willing to do.

2. Reasonable Good Faith

The same section of the handbook requires that "Mills College exercise reasonable good faith in determining that a financial emergency exists." The administration did not consult with the FEC about alternatives to the FSP layoffs prior to declaring a financial emergency. If it had

done so, the FEC could have developed the AP before the Board's declaration of financial emergency and staved off that declaration. Furthermore, the Board did not consider seriously whether the financial problems of Mills were of its own making. The Mills endowment suffered a big loss during and after the financial crisis of 2008 and its value has not recovered since. The returns on the endowment have been subpar, well below market returns one would expect for the risks taken. Further, Mills spends more than \$2.5m annually on fees for active management of the endowment. These funds could be used more wisely, and the endowment could instead be invested passively in index funds, which have performed much better and have very low fees. The faculty does not make these investment decisions; the Board has that fiduciary responsibility, and yet the Board has resisted changing its investment strategy.

3. Application of Layoff Criteria

The handbook (section 2.10.4.3) states that "Mills College will administer the reduction in force guidelines in a fair and systematic manner to ensure that faculty members will be treated equitably."

The Provost has indicated that she used two different sets of criteria to determine which faculty members would be selected for termination, though she has not yet explained fully why there were two sets or how those two sets were used. The first set lists the criteria for layoff as negative (or low) department net revenues, low student demand, low potential for growth, lack of breadth and attractiveness of program, and the availability of lower-cost ways to deliver the program. Putting aside the difficulty of measuring the extent to which these criteria are met, the criteria all have to do with programs, so it seems likely they were used to identify programs to cut. The second set of criteria includes information about individual faculty members: rank, expertise, scholarly productivity, versatility, and engagement in College responsibilities, along with numerical scores in each of these categories. Again, most of these attributes are difficult to measure in ways that can be verified by others. Nevertheless, these criteria seem to have been used to select which faculty positions within departments to eliminate. The main problem is that the criteria were not applied uniformly and consistently to the entire faculty. If one were to do so, one would not select the 11 who got the layoff letters. Many of the 11 teach in departments with positive net revenues. They have high enrollments, outstanding teaching evaluations, impressive scholarly achievements, devoted students and approving colleagues, and they offer courses that are crucial to a quality liberal arts education. It is highly irregular that they were chosen for

termination. It should be acknowledged that bias can be unconscious and unintentional, but it is nevertheless bias.

The Mills Faculty's Alternative Proposal

In a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle (July 11, 2017,) the termination of tenured faculty at Mills was inaccurately described as an effort to avoid co-education. But in June of 2017, the FEC committee, along with several other faculty members including those in the Mills AAUP Chapter, constructed another alternative to the proposed faculty layoffs in the Financial Stabilization Plan (FSP). The alternative proposal (AP), if it had been adopted, would have avoided the termination of tenured faculty members, which many faculty members believe is a serious threat to academic freedom that will tarnish Mills' national and international reputation. More than 70 ranked faculty members signed the AP, finding it more equitable, more effective, and lower risk than the FSP because it yields **immediate, permanent savings that do not require any salary cuts or layoffs**. The AP combines voluntary retirements, part-time employment, and unpaid leaves in order to generate an annual \$1.32m permanent reduction in the faculty salary portion of the instructional budget. The FSP, in contrast, uses five faculty layoffs (all tenured) and some early retirements, to generate annual savings of \$0.76m[1], not counting the costs of extended severance pay, litigation, the likely decline in student revenues, the loss of tenure as a credible promise to faculty hires, and the costs of probable censure by the AAUP.

We believe the administration and Board of Trustees should have earnestly endorsed the AP. Instead, they largely rejected it, and in so doing, they ended the careers of five highly valued faculty members, diminished the quality of the curriculum, cast doubt on the credibility of the College's tenure promise (so important for academic freedom), and saved less in budgetary dollars.

Description of the alternative proposal

1. Retirements

In letters to the Provost, eighteen faculty members pledged to retire between now (June 20th, 2017) and 4 years from now (July 1st, 2021). The vast majority of these promises to retire were conditional on no layoffs of tenured faculty.

The next two provisions in the AP were designed to translate these future permanent savings, from the promised retirements, into immediate and permanent savings.

2. Part-time work for pro-rated pay

Eight faculty members wrote to the Provost and offered to work part-time for pro-rated pay for 1-3 years in exchange for no layoffs.

3. Unpaid leaves

Four faculty members were willing to take leaves without pay for ½ to 3 years, contingent on no faculty layoffs.

Conclusion

Given the most recent data on the FSP's faculty layoffs and retirements, we predict the FSP will yield a total estimated savings in the instructional budget that is 74 percent lower than the savings the AP would have generated, even if we ignore the FSP's additional costs of extended severance pay, arbitration, litigation, and AAUP censure. Under the AP, the savings are to the baseline budget, just as they are in the FSP. Under both plans, we assume 50 percent replacement of courses, whether faculty members leave voluntarily or involuntarily.[2] The main difference between the two plans is whether the Provost or the faculty member chooses the employment separation date. Further, with the AP's leaves and part-time options, objections to hiring adjuncts as replacements would have been unlikely, whereas in the FSP layoff scenario, such replacements could be a problematic violation of the faculty handbook and fodder for additional bad publicity.

[1] These estimates are found as follows: We add up the current annual salaries of the five tenured faculty members who have been terminated and subtract \$7.5K per course 50 percent replacement. We do the same calculation for the faculty members who have taken early retirement.

[2] Arguably, there is a greater opportunity for faculty input into planning the future curriculum when separations are planned and voluntary.

Some Expressions of Solidarity from Outside the Mills Community



UC Berkeley Faculty Association

UC Berkeley chapter of the Council of UC Faculty Associations

(888) 826-3623 www.ucbfa.org

July 10, 2017

To: Elizabeth Hillman, President, Mills College [president@mills.edu]

Board of Trustees, Mills College [trustees@mills.edu] CC: Roger Sparks, Chair, Faculty Executive Committee [rogerwsparks@gmail.com]

Chinyere Oparah, Provost and Dean of the Faculty [jcoparah@mills.edu] The Berkeley Faculty Association is deeply troubled by recent developments at our neighbor institution, Mills College, including the layoff of five tenured faculty members in violation of professional norms and policies enunciated by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and widely accepted throughout American higher education. While we are in no position to reject the Mills administration's claims of financial emergency, we still find these layoffs arbitrary and their rationale unsubstantiated. We are also concerned that it seems that Mills is using the college's financial situation as an excuse to remake the institution's curriculum with virtually no faculty participation. We understand that the Mills Faculty Executive Committee has proposed thoughtful alternatives to layoff that might better address the institution's financial difficulties. We therefore call on the President of Mills College, Elizabeth Hillman, and the Board of Trustees to rescind the layoffs of tenured faculty, to ensure



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June 17, 2017

Elizabeth Hillman, President of Mills College
Chinyere Oparah, Provost of Mills College
Katie Sanborn, Chair of the Board of Trustees

Termination of tenured faculty members as part of your Financial Stabilization Plan represents a threat to academic freedom not just at Mills but at all U.S. universities. Once you establish the pattern, others will follow. All universities have financial challenges: you are providing a model for how this can be used to compromise tenure nationally. Even if you are doing this for what you think of as legitimate reasons, the model is not legitimate and creates a dangerous precedent. Job security for faculty is not simply a matter of good labor practices, it is essential to the underlying structure of liberal arts universities. To target individual faculty members for termination undermines the freedom of all faculty to do their work. To say that this is one time thing, as you do in the announcement, is chilling. It only takes one time to do the damage. One time is one time too many. Mills will be stigmatized, rightly so, as an institution that does not guarantee tenure. In the current labor market, it is an idle threat to say you won't get anyone to work at Mills. But you won't get anyone who has the option of working at somewhere else: a place that respects the tenure process. If you need to trim the faculty, the solution is not the targeted firing of tenured faculty but making buyout offers. For example, while it is illegal to terminate people for age – and your plan surely looks like it violates that law – offering inducement to retire to faculty over a certain age is a perfect legal approach and, indeed, is commendable.

Sincerely,

Charles Bernstein

that all changes to curriculum be approved by the appropriate faculty governance bodies, and to work with faculty leaders to devise a fairer and more transparent solution to the college's difficulties. We also call on faculty everywhere to express their support for our beleaguered Mills colleagues. Yours Sincerely,

The Board of the Berkeley Faculty Association

Michael Burawoy (Chair)

Chris Rosen (Vice-Chair),

Leslie Salzinger (Secretary)

Julia Bryan-Wilson

Penny Edwards

Paul Fine

Lisa García Bedolla

Gillian Hart

Lyn Hejinian

Celeste Langan

Gregory Levine

David O'Sullivan

Shannon Steen

Philosophers at Wellesley, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, and Barnard—all women’s colleges—have authored a letter opposing the elimination of the Mills College Philosophy department . Below is the letter, courtesy of Erich Hatala Matthes (Wellesley):



Dr. Elizabeth L. Hillman

President

Mills College

5000 MacArthur Blvd

Oakland, CA 94613

*Dear President Hillman and Members of the Mills College Board of Trustees,
We write to express our dismay and opposition to your recent decision to eliminate the Mills College philosophy department and lay off the two tenured professors of philosophy who teach in the department. Philosophy is the backbone of a liberal arts education, and the decision to eliminate your philosophy program is flatly inconsistent with your academic mission.*

No doubt you will receive many letters to this effect. But in addition to reinforcing this general concern, we write to you as members of the philosophy faculty at Wellesley, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Bryn Mawr, and Barnard to emphasize the pivotal role of philosophy in women's colleges in particular. For one, philosophy remains a male-dominated field, and women's colleges are uniquely positioned to bring new voices to the discipline. More importantly, however, we occupy a political climate in which truth and reason are under assault, with particularly adverse consequences for women, people of color, and others who have been the subject of systematic injustice. Philosophy teaches students powerful skills that will enhance their ability to make a difference in the world, and women have an essential role to play in that mission. The dismissal of philosophy thus impoverishes both your students and our society. We urge you in the strongest terms to reconsider your decision.

Sincerely,

Macalester Bell

Associate Professor of Philosophy

Bryn Mawr College

Nalini Bhushan

Professor of Philosophy

Smith College

Taylor Carman

Professor of Philosophy, Chair

Barnard College

Maud Chaplin

Professor Emerita of Philosophy

Wellesley College

Ann Congleton

Professor Emerita of Philosophy

Wellesley College

John M. Connolly

Sophia Smith Professor Emeritus of Philosophy

Smith College

Helena de Bres

*Associate Professor of Philosophy
Wellesley College
Jill de Villiers
Sophia & Austin Smith Professor of Psychology & Philosophy
Smith College
David Friedell
Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Barnard College
Jay L. Garfield
Doris Silbert Professor of Philosophy
Smith College
Corinne Gartner
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Wellesley College
James Harold
Chair and Professor of Philosophy
Mount Holyoke College
Susan B. Levin
Roe/Straut Professor in the Humanities; Professor of Philosophy
Smith College
Karen Lewis
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Barnard College
Erich Hatala Matthes
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Wellesley College
Mary Kate McGowan
Margaret Clapp '30 Distinguished Alumna Professor of Philosophy
Wellesley College
Alison G. McIntyre
Virginia Onderdonk '29 Professor of Philosophy
Wellesley College
Ifeanyi A. Menkiti*

Professor Emeritus of Philosophy

Wellesley College

John Morrison

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Barnard College

Albert G. Mosley

Professor of Philosophy

Smith College

Frederick Neuhauser

Professor of Philosophy

Barnard College

Elliot Paul

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Barnard College

Jeffry L. Ramsey

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Chair

Smith College

Elizabeth V. Spelman

Barbara Richmond 1940 Professor in the Humanities, Philosophy

Smith College

Katia Vavova

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Mount Holyoke College

Julie Walsh

Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Wellesley College

Catherine Wearing

Associate Professor of Philosophy, Chair

Wellesley College

Mills College Lays Off Five Tenured Professors

[Hank Reichman](#) / [July 4, 2017](#)

BY HANK REICHMAN

On June 26, the board of trustees of Mills College, meeting behind closed doors, approved a vaguely formulated “[Financial Stabilization Plan](#)” (FSP) previously rejected overwhelmingly by the institution’s faculty. The plan calls for reducing the number of departments from 18 to 13 and the number of schools from four to three. Two majors — Latin American Studies and Philosophy — are to be eliminated as are four minors, including Physics.

As part of the plan, the board sent layoff notices to five full-time tenured faculty members, effective July 1. These include full professors of English, History, Philosophy, and Physics and an associate professor of Ethnic Studies. In June the administration had sent preliminary notices of layoff, pending board action, to eleven faculty members, at least seven of whom (including the five ultimately laid off) hold appointments with tenure. At least two others, one full-time and one less than full-time, are in the midst of three-year term appointments. Three of the eleven, including two full professors with tenure, took early retirement; the remaining three were retained, two of whom accepted changes in their teaching assignments.

Located in Oakland, California, Mills is a small liberal arts college for women with graduate programs that are coeducational. Mills has been distinguished in recent years for its recruitment of students from the surrounding mainly minority community and for its progressive approach to transgender students. A significant number of Mills students receive financial aid. A quarter century ago Mills attempted to address an earlier financial crisis by announcing that it would begin admitting male undergraduates, but a rebellion by students and alumni forced the board to abandon that plan in favor of alternate approaches. In May of this year [the Mills board declared a “financial emergency.”](#) claiming that the school’s annual operating deficit has grown to more than \$9 million. At the time the board said that some 30-35 faculty and staff would need to be laid off, but at this writing the number of staff layoffs is not available.

The board’s decision to lay off just five and not eleven faculty members marked a small concession to the Mills faculty, whose AAUP chapter, supported by the AAUP’s national staff and working through campus institutions of shared governance, has been organizing resistance to the Financial Stabilization Plan. Another hopefully significant concession came with regard to the appeals process open to those laid off. As AAUP Associate Secretary Hans-Joerg Tiede pointed out in letters to Mills College President Elizabeth Hillman on May 25 and June 13, “the appeal procedures for faculty layoffs in the Mills College faculty handbook fall short of . . . Association-recommended procedural standards by severely restricting the

issues that may be raised in such proceeding.” Moreover, under that policy appeals are heard by the provost, who sends a recommendation to the president, which essentially means that the very administrators who authorized the layoff in the first place are those who adjudicate the appeals.

In response to these criticisms Mills Provost and Dean of the Faculty Chinyere Oparah proposed adding a provision that would afford affected faculty members an opportunity to appeal an adverse recommendation by the provost to an outside arbitrator. In a June 29 letter to Professor Roger Sparks, chair of the Mills Faculty Executive Committee, Tiede cited the Association’s [Arbitration of Faculty Grievances](#), which states that “‘where the faculty does not share in the making of decisions,’ as is currently the case in the applicable section of the Mills College faculty handbook, ‘arbitration may have particular utility.’”

It remains to be seen, however, whether this change will favorably impact the outcome of appeals filed by the five faculty members, who have retained legal counsel. The process for selecting arbitrators must be neutral and the standards applied must be rigorous. It should also be clear that the issues subject to arbitration should include the fairness of the criteria by which those laid off were chosen, whether the criteria were rigorously applied, and the financial or other justification for these dismissals.

What is perhaps most striking about the Mills administration’s actions has been its near-total refusal to involve the faculty in planning or to consider faculty opinion. In a May 31 response to Tiede, President Hillman declared, “We value the advice of these [faculty] committees and have adopted a number of their suggestions.” But faculty leaders complain that such consultation has been both infrequent and largely meaningless. The Financial Stabilization Plan adopted on June 26, in addition to being painfully lacking in specifics, outlines major changes in curriculum, staffing, and faculty compensation that were never submitted to the appropriate faculty governance bodies for approval, or even thorough discussion and debate. Indeed, those bodies pointedly rejected earlier versions of the plan as they leaked out, and the faculty as a whole has voted overwhelmingly to support an alternative proposal developed jointly by the Faculty Executive Committee and members of the AAUP chapter.

As Tiede wrote on June 13,

The Faculty Executive Committee provided a list of alternatives that it believed would obviate the need to terminate faculty appointments, thus calling into question whether the declaration of financial emergency was demonstrably bona fide. We are not aware that the administration has provided a rationale for declining to consider these alternatives to terminating faculty appointments.

If the administration’s concern were indeed strictly with finances these layoffs are hardly an effective response. As one of the laid-off faculty members calculated, savings from dismissing the five tenured professors will amount only to about \$50,000 in the first year, given promised severance packages and costs of hiring adjuncts to teach courses previously taught by those laid off. More important, the alternate

plan from the faculty, which proposes a combination of voluntary retirements and workload reductions along with temporary salary reductions over two years, would in fact be measurably more effective in reducing expenses than the administration's plan. The latter, a faculty economist has calculated, would save no more than \$4.8 million over five years, while the faculty plan would save about \$6.6 million over the same period.

In private meetings with faculty leaders, Mills administrators have all but acknowledged that their plan is more than a response to financial emergency. It is, they believe, a bold proposal to remake the college's curriculum, its student body, and its "brand." "At the heart" of the plan, they write, are efforts to "bring revenues to a sustainable level within three years" by implementing five reforms. These are: instituting a "signature undergraduate experience;" building an alliance with the Peralta Community Colleges; expansion of the UC Berkeley Masters in Management and MBA joint program; development of an Executive Education Program; and recruiting efforts of full time athletic coaches. These proposals are all ill-defined, with minimal guarantees of success. And the first proposal for a "signature experience" seems to run counter to the plan's objective commitment to shifting instructional resources from full-time tenured faculty to part-time adjuncts.

Even the selection of the five faculty members now laid off suggests the fuzziness at best of the board's and its administration's alleged vision for Mills' future, pompously entitled "[Mills Next](#)." In a letter to the administration on May 22, the Mills Appointments, Promotion, and Tenure Committee raised questions about the criteria and evidence used to determine layoff order. They wrote:

Layoffs of tenured and tenure track faculty, individuals that have been vetted by the College's APT committee, raise questions about the status of tenure at Mills. If tenure, going forward, is to remain on solid footing at Mills, that should be clearly stated in the FSP in both philosophical and concrete terms. Faculty need to be aware in advance of when and how they will be assessed, and the FSP departs from the College's promotion and tenure practices.

One faculty member laid off is a nationally recognized poet. The original list included a world-renowned jazz musician. But it is perhaps the targeting of the physicist that has most exposed the contempt that Mills administrators have for the college's liberal arts and science tradition and ultimately for their students.

Here is what one Chemistry/Mathematics major wrote after learning that her physics professor would not likely be teaching again at Mills.

By eliminating physics while simultaneously reducing the number of faculty qualified to teach physical chemistry, Mills College is telling us female/non-binary science majors that

we are not eligible competitors in the boys' club of the physical sciences. Think about how this in turn affects female/non-binary empowerment both in STEM and in general.

For this reason, Mills College cannot claim that they are focusing on “academic excellence in the arts, sciences, social sciences, humanities, and technology” (MillsNext p.1) because without a department dedicated to an entire branch of science, we cannot demonstrate such academic excellence.

Another student voiced similar sentiments:

While I truly do not understand why our departments of chemistry and physics — departments so badly in need of support from professors like you to get us into these male dominated fields — were targeted, I still have hope that our college will recognize their mistake. For one of the leading women's colleges to turn their back on chemistry and physics is proof of how hard we as women still have to work for equality. I will continue to advocate for my field.

The layoffs also have about them the odor of retaliation. All those laid off have been active in faculty governance and, in some cases, the AAUP. They are vocal and engaged and their removal suggests at least the possibility that the administration's aim here is as much about decapitating and demoralizing faculty opposition as it is about finances and curriculum. Already one of those laid off has been barred from campus and closed out of the college's email system, even before any appeal process has begun.

It is, of course, no accident that Mills has begun to implement this alleged “plan” as summer begins, when the majority of faculty and students are not around to resist. But AAUP members at Mills and other faculty members are gearing up for a fight this coming fall. Earlier this year the provost proposed addressing the financial problem by having all faculty members teach an additional course each year, with no increase in salary, of course. The Faculty Executive Committee rejected the idea, as did a vote by the entire faculty, but the administration unilaterally imposed it anyway. Now many Mills professors are considering refusing to teach the additional class, since to do so would in effect be to scab on their laid-off colleagues.

The AAUP is proud to stand with our colleagues at Mills and other institutions facing similar assaults on shared governance and faculty rights.

This fight isn't over.