



## Rutgers Council of AAUP-AFT Chapters

American Association of University Professors • American Federation of Teachers  
Representing the Faculty & Graduate Community of Rutgers University

September 2011

### Grievance (RE: Student Threats) Results in Change to On-Line Instructional Ratings Form

A grievance filed earlier this year by the Rutgers AAUP-AFT and Clinical Professor Sarah Tomasello, School of Pharmacy, alleged, in part, that, "the University has failed to respond promptly and appropriately, in accordance with the relevant policies and provisions, for the protection of faculty, students, and other members of the University community, to racist, homophobic, hateful, and threatening comments on student evaluations of at least three faculty members . . . "

The grievance was filed following extremely offensive and threatening comments made by student(s) using the on-line course evaluation system. Professor Tomasello, one of the faculty members targeted, contacted the Union when the administration failed to take action to identify the student(s), which, it was asserted, it had an obligation to do given the extreme nature of the comments. The University administration took the position that in this instance student privacy concerns trumped faculty safety concerns.

We are happy to announce that, notwithstanding the position of the parties to the grievance, the University agreed to add the following sentence to the on-line student evaluation forms:

"Should threats to person or property be made by a student within the Student Instructional Ratings Survey system, action may be taken to identify the individual and investigate the threat."

Though Professor Tomasello has since left the University due to the safety concerns (and also frustration over how concerns were addressed), her efforts to challenge the administration's position in the matter resulted in a meaningful change for all faculty members and for the University community. That is, students are now clearly notified that their right to privacy and anonymity in use of the forms is not absolute.

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