

TO: President, Harvey Stenger; Provost, Donald Nieman; Dean, Celia Klin; Associate Dean, Nancy Um; Senior Director of Media & Public Relations, Ryan Yarosh; and Editor-in-Chief *Pipe Dream*, Jeremy Rubino.

### **Sociology Department Statement on Prof. Ana Candela's Case**

The Sociology Department at Binghamton University is appalled at how the university has handled the situation with our colleague Prof. Ana Candela because the administration seems to be caving in to pressure from conservative students and their like-minded political supporters. It is patently obvious that this entire episode is part of the Culture War flames being fanned by rightwing media, the G.O.P., and their mass-media echo chambers all across the U.S. targeting state-run educational institutions: e.g. the campaign against the alleged teaching of "critical race theory" to schoolchildren, as well as the denunciation of "cancel culture" and "woke courses" at public universities. Yet, the administration appears to act as if this larger context doesn't exist.

The university's official statement in the case of Prof. Candela claims to be based on the faculty handbook. The problem is that the wording of the faculty handbook in this regard is hardly clear-cut. As a matter of fact, not a single one of the eight points listed in that handbook (see section titled: "IV.C.1. Guiding Principles and Practices of Effective Teaching") specifically runs counter to what Prof. Candela wrote in her SOC-100 syllabus. For example, the university's official statement summarizes the principles of effective teaching as involving "valuing and encouraging student feedback, encouraging appropriate faculty-student interaction, and respecting students' diverse talents and learning styles." However, Prof. Candela's SOC-100 syllabus doesn't necessarily contradict the administration's outline of the handbook guidelines for effective teaching, nor does that syllabus contradict the lengthier actual wording of in the handbook. If anything, the argument could easily be made that Prof. Candela's approach to conducting class participation builds on and enhances both the handbook guidelines and the administration's summary of them. Moreover, whenever faculty are publicly scolded for violating campus guidelines, the university is obligated to demonstrate what exactly were the principles being violated, among other things because the reputation, wisdom, and expertise of that professor (and, indirectly, of her department) are being put into question. That is especially true when the mass media is widely making known the university's formal rebuke of Prof. Candela's teaching practice and when those in the media who are heaping scorn on this faculty member are doing so referencing the administration's official statement in this case.

Even more to the point, the university should take more seriously and more consistently the underlying principles of affirmative action as they might apply—by analogy—to Prof. Candela's syllabus/ course. All Prof. Candela did was translate policies favoring underprivileged groups in the allocation of resources (or employment) and then apply that principle to the classroom setting. Her initial syllabus explicitly said individuals belonging to groups known to have been discriminated against in the past or in the present would be favored when it came to class participation. But the syllabus did NOT say, for example, that white male students wouldn't be

allowed to speak in class (as has been alleged by the student who brought up the original complaint, a mischaracterization being echoed in conservative mass media). The syllabus simply stated the latter students wouldn't be receiving the usual favors and privileges that have allowed them to monopolize class discussions in other courses. It's no accident that the same rightwing student groups and political interests currently denouncing Prof. Candela are also the same groups and interests who for decades have been railing against affirmative action policies. By (inadvertently or not) throwing their weight behind this student's complaints, the administration is leaving a flank open for the further weakening and dismantling of affirmative action programs and practices on this same campus and that this administration purportedly upholds, all to the detriment of the students such programs aim to assist and support. Coincidentally, these are the very same students Prof. Candela's class-participation policy was also meant to assist and support, policies that the university has banned but a prohibition the administration has yet to specifically explain and justify. In the process, the administration's actions is resulting in actual harm to Prof. Ana Candela by making her a target of harassment (as in the hate mail and threatening messages she's recently been receiving) and potentially damaging her career by, among other things, siding with the student leading the charge of those conservative circles impugning her character and professional abilities as a university professor.

Those are some of the reasons why we strongly support Prof. Ana Candela and what she stands for as a teacher.