

Memorandum

To: Chancellor Dennis J. Shields
From: Dean Elizabeth Throop
Re: Complaint against Dr. Sabina Burton
Date: January 5, 2015

Pursuant to Wis. Admin. Code § UWS 6.01, I am submitting this complaint against Dr. Sabina Burton. I seek discipline of Dr. Burton for her refusal to follow directions, her insubordination, her violation of the Employee Handbook, and for her continued disruptive behavior.

On October 28, 2014, I provided Dr. Burton with the attached letter of direction summarizing my concerns about her pattern of engaging in uncollegial and disruptive behaviors (Exhibit A). Shortly after she received the letter, Dr. Burton indicated to me that she had no intention of complying with my directions (November 12, 2014 email, Exhibit B), and she has continued with the same behaviors.

Refusal to recuse from Department of Criminal Justice chair search committee (Direction #2)

In the October 28 Letter of Direction, I summarized Dr. Burton's pattern of mistreating Dr. Michael Dalecki, the interim chair of the Department of Criminal Justice. Because I knew that he intended to apply for the chair position and that Dr. Burton was to serve on the search committee, I met with Dr. Burton on October 15, 2014, along with Dr. Zauche, the search committee chair, and told her that because she was biased against Dr. Dalecki she should refrain from participating in his interview or in any discussions about his candidacy. Dr. Burton indicated that she would do so, but later informed me that she had understood my request to be that she recuse herself only if she thought she was biased. I clarified that I had already determined that she was biased and told her that she must refrain from participating in discussions or interviews of Dr. Dalecki or I would remove her from the search committee entirely. Dr. Burton then sent correspondence stating her refusal to comply (Exhibit C, email dated December 8, 2014, 10:36 p.m.) and so I removed her from the search committee.

In addition, Dr. Burton has sent unprofessional and inappropriate email communication on this issue to the search chair (Exhibit D, December 9, 2014 1:53 p.m.) and to me (Exhibit E, December 9, 2014 12:48 p.m.). She has protested the naming of Dr. Zauche as search committee chair, despite the fact that the Criminal Justice department voted in favor of having an outside faculty member chair the search committee on August 29, 2014 (Exhibit F, Minutes of CJ Department Meeting, August 29, 2014). Dr. Burton did not raise any objections to this vote on August 29.

Unprofessional and inappropriate communications to other University Community members (Direction #2)

In the October 28 letter, I directed Dr. Burton to “cease all email activity making groundless and unwarranted accusations against Dr. Dalecki or other members of the university community.”

Dr. Burton has continued to threaten and accuse various members of the community. She sent the attached unprofessional and demeaning communication to the grievance committee (Exhibit G, email to Dr. Balachandran December 10, 2014 9:13 p.m.). Dr. Burton has attempted to discuss her grievances against Dr. Dalecki and her issues with me with members of the Grievance Commission, including Dan Fairchild, the initial convener of the Grievance Commission, and with Dr. Balachandran—to such an extent that he has elected to be absent from campus much more frequently than he would be otherwise. Indeed, Dr. Balachandran has removed himself from hearing Dr. Burton’s grievance as a result of her email marked Exhibit G. Dr. Burton’s behavior has been increasingly erratic and profoundly unprofessional.

Dr. Solar (Direction #4)

Dr. Burton has threatened Dr. Pat Solar with adverse consequences to his progress toward tenure because she believes—incorrectly—that the faculty searches this year were conducted “illegally” (Exhibit H, email thread between Dr. Burton and Dr. Solar beginning on October 16, 2014), telling him that her “annual evaluation letter” would have to note his “illegal” activity. I directed her to apologize to him and to remove herself from any consideration of his progress toward tenure; she has refused (in a memo dated November 11, 2014, Exhibit I) my direction to apologize to Dr. Solar and to remove herself from his evaluation.

Solving problems on the most local level possible (Direction #1)

Dr. Burton has filed a complaint against Deb Rice, Academic Staff in the Department of Criminal Justice for “defamation.” Instead of having a face to face conversation to try to work out the problem, Dr. Burton went immediately for an official complaint, in direct defiance of my Direction #1 to her.

I outline other unprofessional and disturbing behaviors by Dr. Burton in my Letter of Direction.

Involving students in her disputes (Direction #5)

On December 16, 2014, a member of the Criminal Justice Department told me that students had reported that Dr. Burton had canceled classes on Friday, December 12, 2014, to travel to Germany for the weekend. I asked that person to confirm the report, and I received a confirmation. As a result, I sent an email to Dr. Burton on December 16, 2014 admonishing her for her behavior. Dr. Burton emailed her students in the evening of December 16, 2014, asking them to verify that class was held. I did receive four emails verifying that class was held, so I may have been misinformed. However, Dr. Burton’s email (Exhibit J) is profoundly

unprofessional, drawing students into her disputes. This is a direct violation of my direction to her to keep students out of her disputes. Her email is also factually inaccurate.

Summary

Dr. Burton's escalating patterns of harassing behaviors have had several consequences. One is that her departmental colleagues avoid interacting with her and find her difficult at best. They spend hours upon hours attempting to manage their interactions with her. She has no support among her colleagues. Another is that senior leadership has spent many hours—sometimes twenty hours a week—trying to find ways to redirect Dr. Burton's poor behaviors into more productive avenues, to no avail. At this juncture, Dr. Burton's behavior is so difficult that she is significantly interrupting the normal course of business at this university. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. I would request that you issue a formal letter of reprimand to be placed in Dr. Burton's personnel file and that you explore further disciplinary options.