

California Institute of Integral Studies

Report of the Faculty Hearing Board

For Angana Chatterji

Prepared by the Hearing Board members:

Tanya Wilkinson, Chair
Jim Ryan
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I. Introduction

The Hearing Board held two hearings on Angana Chatterji's case, October 28, 2011 from 1 pm to 6:30 pm and October 29, 2011 from 1 pm to 5 pm. Attending both days of hearings were the following: Angana Chatterji; Academic Vice-President Judie Wexler and Dean of Students Shirley Strong; the court reporter who transcribed the sessions; and the Hearing Board members: Tanya Wilkinson, Chair, Jim Ryan, and Brant Cortright. The hearings were held at 222 Front Street, Suite 600, San Francisco, CA. A complete transcript of the sessions will be made available to all parties.

Prior to the hearings, procedures were established by which documents could be entered into the official record of the Hearing Board, and each party received a copy of this written record prior to the actual hearings. The Hearing Board closely examined the official record that included: the original report on the investigation into the Social and Cultural Anthropology Department conducted by the Academic Vice-President and the Dean of Students, the response to this report by Angana Chatterji, letters from over 50 students, Angana Chatterji's personnel file, numerous emails and correspondence between the administration and Angana Chatterji, and many other documents.

At the hearings, witnesses testified for about one-half hour and were then questioned by the other side for about one-half hour. On the first day of the hearings AVP Wexler and Dean Strong presented five witnesses, each of whom was questioned by Angana Chatterji with some additional questions from the Hearing Board. On the second day Angana Chatterji presented five witnesses, with some questions from AVP Wexler and Dean Strong and some additional questions from the Hearing Board. The Hearing Board deliberated privately on November 10, 2011 to reach its conclusions.

II. Summary of Charges

The four charges are as follows:

- 1) Knowing or reckless violation of established legal rights of students to confidentiality, to non-discrimination, non-harassment and non-retaliation as provided for by the policies of the Institute; and to the faculty services due to them under Institute policies and practices.
- 2) Knowing or reckless violation of the professional ethics of the Institute or of the rights and freedom of fellow students, faculty or administrators.
- 3) Dishonesty, including misapplication of funds.
- 4) Persistent failure to perform position-related assignments or other neglect of academic duties.

III. Conclusions of Hearing Board with Respect to the Charges

- 1) Knowing or reckless violation of established legal rights of students to confidentiality, to non-discrimination, non-harassment and non-retaliation as provided for by the policies of the Institute; and to the faculty services due to them under Institute policies and practices.

The Academic Vice-President and Dean of Students did satisfy their burden to prove the validity of this charge by means of evidence that the Hearing Board found to be reliable.

- 2) Knowing or reckless violation of the professional ethics of the Institute or of the rights and freedom of fellow students, faculty or administrators.

The Academic Vice-President and Dean of Students did satisfy their burden to prove the validity of this charge by means of evidence that the Hearing Board found to be reliable.

- 3) Dishonesty, including misapplication of funds.

The Academic Vice-President and Dean of Students did satisfy their burden to prove the validity of this charge by means of evidence that the Hearing Board found to be reliable.

- 4) Persistent failure to perform position-related assignments or other neglect of academic duties.

The Academic Vice-President and Dean of Students did satisfy their burden to prove the validity of this charge by means of evidence that the Hearing Board found to be reliable.

Further, the Hearing Board supports the actions of the Academic Vice-President and Dean of Students in recommending that Angana Chatterji be relieved of all duties and dismissed from the Institute but be given pay for the rest of the academic year. The Hearing Board believes that there is a substantial risk of further damage to students and CHS unless such immediate action is undertaken.

IV. Summary of Reasoning for Conclusions of Hearing Board

The Hearing Board was unanimous in its conclusions. The evidence was strong and compelling. We believe almost any three faculty members would have come to the same conclusions.

Just as a hostile work environment is often one in which certain categories of employees are subject to harassment and ill-treatment, but others may not suffer such treatment at all and may even be unaware of it, so can an abusive academic environment be very damaging to certain classes of students, while others may not have the same experiences at all. There was a clear divide in the testimony and letters for the Hearing Board between students who claimed to never have experienced (or even seen) anything negative in Dr. Chatterji's academic conduct and those who experienced or witnessed Dr. Chatterji treating students with astonishing callousness and disdain, treatment that created among a significant group of students great fear, anxiety, pain and disruption in their academic development. Clearly the student complainants experienced harassment, retaliation and discrimination in their relationships with Dr. Chatterji.

The Hearing Board found the students who had severe complaints credible. Why would so many students come forward to report experiencing or witnessing ill-treatment, if this did not in fact exist? These students who had severely negative experiences (supported by other witnesses on the record) experienced Dr. Chatterji as someone who would casually squelch student comment or opinion in the classroom and outside it, and who created an atmosphere where a significant number of students felt their safest path was submission to her ways, ideas and dictates without the usual and sensible free flow of ideas that make for robust academic discourse and interchange. As the Chair of the Department was her husband and students experienced him (as the Hearing Board did) as someone always ready to provide excuses for his wife's apparent misbehavior, the academic atmosphere was distorted, it seems, into an arena of conformity to the ideas and whims of this powerful and charismatic faculty person. Dr. Chatterji did not try to directly deny the use of harsh personal interchanges within and outside class, but tried to show, in her appearance before the Hearing Board, that whatever the testimony, she never treated students with malice. Whatever her intent, it was Dr. Chatterji's responsibility to monitor and assess the impact her behavior was having on her students. She does not appear to have reflected on this, even at the time of her hearing.

The Hearing Board was shocked at the climate of fear and intimidation within the program fostered by Dr. Chatterji. The abuse of power, the stifling of students' growth and professional development, the controlling behavior toward students in their personal lives and the CIIS Student Association and in supposedly confidential student surveys, the "siege mentality" in which enemies were seen to be constantly threatening the two leaders of the program who then needed to be protected at all costs, the traumatization of students and the ensuing loss of confidence and self-esteem, the strong negative impact on their academic and professional careers, the exploitation of students for faculty interests, the promotion of a cult-like atmosphere that banishes dissent and dissenters – all of this went unacknowledged and unrecognized by Dr. Chatterji. This makes the issue of remediation problematic. How can something be repaired when there is a refusal to acknowledge it is broken?

In addition, Professor Chatterji has admitted to giving students gifts, giving at least one student money, and paying personally for at least one student's travel (student name redacted). It also appears that students and work/study student employees have been asked to do editorial work and provide other kinds of support for Professor Chatterji's research. It is not clear which students have been paid for such work, or if they have been "paid" in terms of privilege. These dual and multiple relationships with students set up an atmosphere both of favoritism and of personal obligation for the student. It appears that Professor Chatterji has crossed the line from mentoring to patronage.

Professor Chatterji admits that she has falsified grades, although she refers to her practice as awarding an "honor grade". The circumstances in which Professor Chatterji states she gave such grades are the precise circumstances in which one normally gives an incomplete. Every semester, when the registrar sends all Faculty a request for grades, a detailed explanation of what grades should be given under what circumstances is included. A competent professor both understands and carefully follows these clearly described (and entirely usual) policies. All professors take on the ethical duty of grading honestly and fairly. The entire enterprise of education rests on the trust that students, educational institutions, accrediting bodies and society in general have in the integrity of the instructor. The simple fact that students in Professor Chatterji's classes who did not complete the coursework received the same grades as those who did complete the work, means that students were not evaluated as equals. The harm caused by the granting of fraudulent grades cannot be understated, since it has caused the Institute to inadvertently misrepresent the academic standing of SCA students to the Dept. of Education and WASC. Falsification of grades threatens the ability of CIIS to be eligible for students loans and so threatens the very existence of CIIS itself. Professor Chatterji's own response (in her letter dated July 11) makes it clear that, even after having been challenged by Dean Wexler, she still did not understand that this grading practice is both dishonest and illegal, so she could not be trusted to discontinue it.

Another aspect of Professor Chatterji's grading practices that is unusual and concerning is the very high percentage of incompletes given to students in her classes. An average of 43% of the students in the Professor's classes receive a grade of incomplete and, in some classes, 90% of students receive incompletes. When asked about this pattern Professor Chatterji stated that the bulk of the incomplete grades were given in a Spring semester class that required fieldwork, which was then done in the Summer semester. This seems to mean that the field work was unsupervised. It also raises the question, why not teach the class in the Summer? The large number of incompletes carried by SCA students may be an important factor in the very slow progress that SCA students make in the program.

It is possible that Professor Chatterji's grading practices may be part of a pattern of ignoring and subverting clearly defined CIIS procedures. The Hearing Board sees evidence of such a pattern in the type of written responses Professor Chatterji has given to Dean Wexler over the course of the last 4 years. These responses are full of inaccurate reframings of the Dean's written requests for various types of normal accountability. In addition she uses language that strongly suggests that she does not accept normal supervision (example: "you are monitoring me"), and appears to avoid meeting with the Dean, who is her direct supervisor. All Faculty should be willing to be supervised and be available for feedback concerning any aspect of their performance of duties.

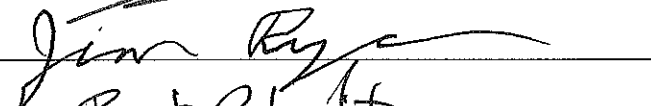
Professor Chatterji's correspondence with the Dean gives the strong impression that she is not willing to be supervised. When asked for her own understanding of why she is now in danger of losing her position, the Professor stated that she believes it is because she and the Dean stopped getting along. This lack of reflection on the ramifications of her own behavior and choices gave the Hearing Board the impression that she is unlikely to change that behavior and those choices. Actions taken by Professor Chatterji that are described above constitute failures to adequately perform academic duties.

Recap of Conclusions:

The Hearing Board unanimously concluded that there was clear and convincing evidence supporting dismissal for adequate cause shown to the Board.

The Hearing Board unanimously recommends to the President and the Board of Trustees that dismissal of the faculty member be sustained.

Tanya Wilkinson 

Jim Ryan 

Brant Cortright 