

Wheaton College reverses efforts to fire professor, but she won't return to teach



Michael Easley

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Unbelievable. Astonishing. Academic Freedom and tenure trump Biblical Christian Orthodoxy.

Larycia Hawkins, a tenured political science professor at Wheaton College, stands with supporters to address media at Chicago Temple on Jan. 6, 2016.

(Zbigniew Bzdak / Chicago Tribune)

[Manya Brachear Pashman](#) [Contact Reporter](#) Chicago Tribune

A tenured professor at [Wheaton College](#) suspended for saying Muslims and Christians worship the same God has reached an agreement with the west suburban evangelical school to end her employment there, while the administrator who called for her termination has apologized for acting in haste.

Wheaton Provost Stanton Jones told professors in an email Saturday night that he had turned over the decision of whether to vacate the administrative leave of their colleague, Larycia Hawkins, to college President Philip Ryken. But two hours later, faculty received another email from Ryken, informing them that Hawkins would not return to teach.

"The administration and Dr. Hawkins have come to a place of resolution and reconciliation," Ryken wrote. "With a mutual desire for God's blessing, we have decided to part ways."

Ryken invited faculty to a private worship service at Edman Memorial Chapel Tuesday night and a reception, where Hawkins will say goodbye.

"This is a time for prayer, lament, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation," Ryken said.

The settlement agreement appears to bring to a close a drama that began in December when Hawkins announced on Facebook that she would don a hijab as part of her Advent devotion to show support for Muslims who had been under scrutiny since mass shootings in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif.

"I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book," she posted on Facebook, along with a photograph of herself in a hijab. "And as Pope Francis stated ... we worship the same God."

Within days, the college placed Hawkins on paid administrative leave through the spring semester, pending a review. According to the private evangelical college, not clarifying what makes Christianity distinct from Islam put Hawkins in conflict with Wheaton's statement of faith. Though she submitted a theological response to questions about her statement of solidarity, Jones said it did not resolve the issues.

Hawkins said the college had recommended that she resign. She said the college also proposed a two-year revocation of her tenure, during which time she would continue conversations about the theological implications of her statements and her decision to wear the hijab. Then, before students returned to campus from winter break in January, Jones took the first step toward firing Hawkins.

A few weeks later, the college's Faculty Council, a group of professors elected by their peers, unanimously recommended withdrawing Hawkins' suspension and halting termination proceedings against the associate professor of political science, "due to grave concerns about the process."

In his email to colleagues Saturday night, Jones said he stood by his concerns about Hawkins' theological statements but added that he apologized for appearing to question the sincerity of her Christian faith and acknowledged that he had failed to see her theological response "was a promising start toward answering satisfactorily some of the questions that I was raising at the time."

"I asked Dr. Hawkins for her forgiveness for the ways I contributed to the fracture of our relationship, and to the fracture of Dr. Hawkins' relationship with the college," he wrote. "While I acted to exercise my position of oversight of the faculty within the bounds of Wheaton College employment policies and procedures, I apologized for my lack of wisdom and collegiality as I initially approached Dr. Hawkins, and for imposing an administrative leave more precipitously than was necessary."

On Saturday, some faculty expressed anger and confusion. Given the proximity of both announcements, some questioned whether Jones' apology was merely a condition of a legal settlement. They also didn't like the political appearance of the college trying to appease both the conservative and progressive sides of its constituencies.

Ryken said because Hawkins' suspension raised concerns about academic freedom, due process, the leaking of confidential information, possible violations of faculty governance, and gender and racial discrimination, he has asked the board of trustees to conduct a review. He said he hopes that review will improve the way Wheaton College addresses faculty personnel issues in the future, especially when they relate to the statement of faith.

Shortly after Faculty Council called for Hawkins' reinstatement, Gary Burge, a professor of New Testament, said he looked forward to what he called "a restoration and reconciliation service" at Edman Chapel to celebrate Hawkins' return and repent for the way she had been mistreated. The service Tuesday only fulfills half of that aspiration.

"This decision by the provost is a tribute to his integrity and courage," Burge said. "But many of us are wondering why the president's reconciliation with Dr. Hawkins did not include her remaining on our faculty."

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Ray Chang pointed this out to me. I'm hoping this, not the Tribune piece is accurate.

Joint Statement by Wheaton College and Dr. Larycia Hawkins Announcing a Resolution | Wheaton

February 6, 2016 Wheaton College and Associate Professor of Political Science Dr. Larycia Hawkins announce they have come together and found a mutual place of resolution and reconciliation. The College and Dr. Hawkins have reached a confidential agreement under which they will part ways. "Wheaton Co..."

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Statement by Wheaton College Regarding the Diversity Committee Memo to the Faculty Personnel Committee

Statement Regarding the Wheaton Faculty Council's Recommendation to the Administration

Statement by Wheaton College Regarding Press Conference Held by Dr. Larycia Hawkins

Statement by Wheaton College Regarding Notice of Recommendation to Initiate Termination Proceedings as to Dr. Larycia Hawkins

Statement Regarding Dr. Larycia Hawkins' Review and Resolution Process

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Dr. Larycia Hawkins' Administrative Leave from Wheaton College

Wheaton College Statement Regarding Dr. Larycia Hawkins

Wheaton College Statement Regarding Christian Engagement with Muslim Neighbors

February 6, 2016

Wheaton College and Associate Professor of Political Science Dr. Larycia Hawkins announce they have come together and found a mutual place of resolution and reconciliation. The College and Dr. Hawkins have reached a confidential agreement under which they will part ways.

"Wheaton College sincerely appreciates Dr. Hawkins' contributions to this institution over the last nine years," says Wheaton College President Dr. Philip Graham Ryken. "We are grateful for her passionate teaching, scholarship, community service and mentorship of our students."

In reflecting on her years at Wheaton, Dr. Hawkins says, "I appreciate and have great respect for the Christian liberal arts and the ways that Wheaton College exudes that in its mission, programs, and in the caliber of its employees and students."

Both parties share a commitment to care for the oppressed and the marginalized, including those who are marginalized because of their religious beliefs, and to respectful dialogue with people of other faiths or no faith. While parting ways, both Wheaton College and Dr. Hawkins wish the best for each other in their ongoing work.

In pursuit of further public reconciliation, a joint press conference will be held at the Chicago Temple First United Methodist Church, 77 W. Washington St., in Chicago, on Wednesday, February 10, at 10:00 a.m.

Neither Wheaton College nor Dr. Hawkins will speak to the press about their relationship or their reconciliation before the scheduled press conference, and there will be no questions taken by the parties at or after the press conference.