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BURLINGTON VERMONT. United Academics, the union representing more than 700 faculty at the University of Vermont, has released a resolution criticizing recent actions by the administration of Vermont Law School, particularly the revocation of tenure for 75% of the faculty. The resolution calls for them to change course and find a way to cut costs that stays within professional norms. The [American Association of Law Schools](#), of which [VLS has been a member](#) since 1982, [subscribes to the AAUP's 1940 Statement](#) of Principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure. The resolution accuses VLS leadership of abrogating those principles when it revoked tenure for 75% of its faculty and then required faculty to sign non-disclosure agreements prohibiting them from criticizing the actions or lose their jobs. "Those principles are not optional for a serious institution of higher education," according to the resolution. "They form the fabric of academic professional life."

Asked what the consequences of the tenure revocations for VLS might be, UA President Tom Streeter said, "VLS is a very fine law school with a unique and professional faculty. I know that AAUP is investigating the situation at VLS. AAUP will need to follow their procedures, but it certainly seems to me the violations of the 1940 Statement are transparent and egregious. I can't imagine how that will help VLS recruit more students."

Full text of statement:

The Executive Council of United Academics, the faculty union of the University of Vermont, calls on the leadership of Vermont Law School to restore tenure to its faculty. The principles laid out in [1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#) define academic professionalism in the United States, and create the framework of disciplined free inquiry that is necessary to the advancement of knowledge.

Those principles are not optional for a serious institution of higher education. They form the fabric of academic professional life. The framework the principles create has, for example, helped nurture productive formal and informal relationships between UVM and VLS faculty over the years. If VLS continues on its course, it might become harder to maintain those relationships; granting agencies, accrediting institutions, and the like will find it harder to support an institution that has isolated itself from national professional standards.

The 1940 rules contain mechanisms for dealing with tough financial situations, which are used by institutions all over the United States on a regular basis. Program reductions and other cost savings are always a possibility, and if an institution declares financial exigency according to the rules and fully cooperates with faculty in developing solutions, releasing tenured faculty is a possibility. But the leadership of VLS did none of that. Faculty were informed of the financial problems, but the "solutions" were worked out behind closed doors, with no respect for professional norms or academic freedom. This is not practical decision making in hard circumstances; it is folly.

The leadership of VLS needs to go back to the drawing board and develop solutions to its financial difficulties that keep the institution within the framework of academic freedom.

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