

After Persecution, Christian Professor Awarded Back Pay, Given Promotion

A federal court Tuesday ordered the University of North Carolina–Wilmington to promote a professor to the rank of full professor, a position it originally denied him, and to pay him \$50,000 in back pay. In March, a jury found that university officials had retaliated against criminology professor Mike Adams for expressing conservative views in his opinion columns, books and speeches when those officials denied him a promotion in 2006.

“As the marketplace of ideas, universities must respect the freedom of professors to express their points of view,” says Alliance Defending Freedom litigation staff counsel Travis Barham. “The jury last month found that disagreeing with an accomplished professor’s religious and political views is no grounds for denying him a promotion. The court’s order rights the wrong done to Dr. Adams by granting him the full professorship he has long deserved.”

“This is a great day not only for Dr. Adams but for all who value academic freedom,” says senior counsel Kevin Theriot. “The court’s order reminds universities that they cannot retaliate against those who simply express opinions that some officials do not like.”

Since 2007, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) attorneys have represented Adams together with lead counsel David French, who began the case with ADF and now litigates for the American Center for Law and Justice.

The order in *Adams v. The Trustees of the University of North Carolina–Wilmington* from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina, Southern Division, states,

“The court hereby orders the defendants confer upon plaintiff full professorship as of the date of this order, with pay and benefits in the future to relate back to August 2007, when plaintiff’s 2006 promotion application would have gone into effect had it been successful.”

In 2011, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit determined that the First Amendment protects the opinion columns that Adams published, saying that “no individual loses his ability to speak as a private citizen by virtue of public employment. ... Adams’ columns addressed topics such as academic freedom, civil rights, campus culture, sex, feminism, abortion, homosexuality, religion, and morality. Such topics plainly touched on issues of public, rather than private, concern.”

A former atheist, Adams frequently received accolades from his colleagues after the university hired him as an assistant professor in 1993 and promoted him to associate professor in 1998. His conversion to Christianity in 2000 impacted his views on political and social issues. Subsequently, the university subjected Adams to a campaign of academic persecution that culminated in his denial of promotion to full professor, despite an award-winning record of teaching, research and service.