

Atheist Professor Finds Christ, Loses Promotion, Files Lawsuit

Dr. Mike Adams, a criminology professor at the University of North Carolina–Wilmington, was a favorite among colleagues—until his conversion to Christianity from atheism.

After his conversion in 2000, which impacted his views on political and social issues, Adams was subjected to intrusive investigations, baseless accusations and the denial of promotion to full professor even though his scholarly output surpassed that of almost all of his colleagues.

In a lawsuit filed against the university on Adams' behalf, Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys contend that the university denied Adams a promotion because his nationally syndicated opinion columns espoused religious and political views that ran contrary to the opinions held by university officials.

In a trial that began Monday, a jury will consider whether the University of North Carolina–Wilmington retaliated against one of its professors for his views. Last year, a federal court found sufficient evidence to warrant a trial after an appeals court determined that the First Amendment protects the views criminology professor Dr. Mike Adams published in opinion columns with which university officials disagreed.

Alliance Defending Freedom litigation staff counsel Travis Barham will be available for media interviews at the end of each day of the trial. Lead counsel David French, who began the case with Alliance Defending Freedom and now litigates for the American Center for Law and Justice, will also be available for interviews.

“Universities are supposed to be a marketplace of ideas, not a place where professors face retaliation for having a different view than university officials,” Barham says. “Disagreeing with an accomplished professor’s religious and political views is no grounds for denying him a promotion. As the 4th Circuit affirmed, protecting academic freedom for university professors is critical, and opinion columns are among the purest examples of free speech that the First Amendment protects.”

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit wrote in 2011 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.