

BOYCOTT LOOMS AT CUNY Law students rally in support of tenure for prof

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Body

After staging a three-day hunger strike, students at CUNY Law School are threatening to boycott graduation if a popular Asian-American professor is denied tenure.

The students and at least one professor at the school also are charging that denying Prof. Maivan Lam tenure is part of an ongoing pattern of discrimination on the part of the school administration toward its faculty members of minority background.

Lam, a well-respected professor of international law who has taught at the school since 1992, was born in Vietnam.

"The dean of the school and the administration have repeatedly marginalized women of color," said Izumi Miyake, a second-year law student.

Dorothy Zellner, spokeswoman for CUNY Law School Dean Kristin Booth Glen, said, "The dean cannot make any comment about personnel."

About the charges of discrimination, Zellner said, "This law school is enormously proud of its record and commitment to the diversity and quality of its faculty and student body. That has always been the standard at the law school and its leadership, and will continue to be so."

Some professors, including Lam, would disagree.

Charging that Glen had delayed a decision on tenure for Lam for five months, Dinesh Khosla, a tenured professor at the Flushing school, said, "That is how she [Glen] treats people of color, particularly those who disagree with her on policy."

According to Lam, Glen had told her she was good enough to be teaching at Columbia Law School but was a "mismatch" for CUNY.

"That is an odd reason," Lam said.

As for tenure, Lam said, "I've earned it."

She said she has published 12 academic articles and a book, far surpassing the two published articles that fulfill the minimum requirement for tenure.

Thirty-five percent of the law school's faculty are of minority background, and the school recently ranked fifth in the nation for having the most minority hires, according to Zellner.

Passions are running high on the 450-student campus. Last week, nine students and one professor fasted from Tuesday through Thursday - one student was sent to a hospital and treated for dehydration - in an attempt to force Glen to give Lam tenure.

While the strike didn't immediately get the results they sought, and students are gathering signatures to hold an alternate graduation, Glen told the students last Thursday that she would decide on tenure for Lam by tomorrow.

The hunger strike and the mounting graduation boycott is part of an apparently increasing level of frustration on the part of students and some faculty with the school administration on a second front.

In an effort to improve the number of students who pass the bar exam, they said, the school has moved too far toward a traditional law school curriculum and away from the original mission of the school - training public-interest lawyers.

"Prof. Lam has become a focal point for a lot of issues," said Tina Minkowitz, a third-year student from Staten Island. "What is the overall direction the school has been going in, and do we really care in a public-interest mission?"

Kholsa said Lam had been recommended for reappointment by a committee he chaired in 1999 and then recommended for tenure last year.

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