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- [News](#)
- [Opinions](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Arts](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Photo Gallery](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [U-WIRE](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Alumni](#)
- [Directory](#)

Faculty react to complaint line

By Artemy Kalinovsky

GW professors at Friday's Faculty Senate meeting called for the University to immediately disconnect a phone number anyone can call to file an anonymous complaint about a faculty member.

Professors unanimously passed a resolution condemning the line, reiterating a previous demand that it be disconnected because they said it infringes on academic freedom within the University.

A similar resolution was passed a month ago, but senators said GW Vice President and Treasurer Louis Katz did not act on it. The number was still in operation during Friday's meeting.

Lilien Robinson, chairwoman of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, said she did not receive a response from Katz until Friday morning.

"We would like to see the line immediately suspended so that it can be studied," Robinson said.

Katz wrote in a letter addressed to Robinson that he did not consider the line to be a problem on April 11.

"I continue to believe that the general operation of the compliance program and compliance line are laudable and not objectionable," Katz wrote.

Katz also indicated he would be willing to work with the faculty to study the operation of the compliance line but did not see any reason to disconnect it.

Katz was unavailable for comment.

Michael Casselberry, a faculty senator and professor in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, said he and other senators felt the University was trying to usurp the Senate's input.

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"This is part of the way that the faculty of the University are trying to restrain the opportunities for the administration to control the area of academic governance," Casselberry said after the meeting.

GW Law School professor John Banzhaf released a statement April 5 on behalf of the GW faculty demanding the immediate suspension of the line to avoid compromising academic freedom.

"Academic freedom isn't safe if any student or faculty member can be the target of an anonymous complaint and investigation about a fabricated comment," he wrote.

The Senate also passed resolutions designed to bring the School of Public Health and Health Services up to faculty code standards requiring the school to hire more faculty for tenure-track positions. The Senate also amended the faculty code to make the College of Professional Studies a part of GW. It will employ current University-tenured faculty.

Another resolution, submitted by senator and English professor David McAleavey for the Vice President of Academic Affairs Donald Lehman calls for a joint student-faculty committee to study the current teacher evaluation system and create a "workable set of surveys" that would be specialized for different classes.

"The academic panel (will) be charged with creating a different version of the 'Academic Update' keyed into the most common types of courses offered at the University, including, for example, large lectures; lecture discussion courses; studio/workshop courses; seminars; laboratories and recitation or discussion sections," the resolution said.

The resolution also called for examining the possibility of increasing the availability of evaluation results to students.

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