



# The GW Hatchet Online

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## GW may cut complaint line SJT suggests complaint office

By *Trevor Martin*

GW may disconnect the anonymous tip line that allows anonymous students and staff members to lodge complaints against professors, GW President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg said this week. He said in-person complaint system is being considered.

Trachtenberg called the program "aggressive." The Faculty Senate unanimously condemned the idea after Vice President and Treasurer Louis Katz started the phone line without consulting professors or telling them about it before it was implemented.

Katz, who could not be reached for comment, defended the hotline at the April 12 Faculty Senate meeting and called the system "laudable and not objectionable."

The toll-free phone number, 1-888-508-5275, is managed by North Carolina-based Pinkerton Security Services and has been in use since February. Faculty Senate members complain the line hurts their academic freedom and allows students to carry out personal vendettas against professors.

The University has taken criticism from professors and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a non-profit educational foundation that advocates free speech and other liberties on college campuses. The Senate unanimously passed two resolutions since March condemning the line.

Calls can trigger secret investigations and secret dossiers about those investigations, law professor and Faculty Senate member John Banzhaf said.

Although federal law requires GW to provide an outlet for complaints, Trachtenberg said the technology involved in the 24-hour hotline might make it too easy to abuse.

Students or staff members who call are given an option of

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providing their name and are given a report number to check the status of their complaint within two weeks.

Faculty Senate Chairwoman and art history professor Lilien Robinson said sentencing guidelines, which govern the University's responsibilities if litigation is filed against it, recommend a complaint hotline but only require a program to file complaints about criminal activities.

"To pretend we are blind or deaf to complaints is to open up the University to liability for not paying attention," he said. "So the question is how vigorously do we have to (make ourselves open to complaints)."

Trachtenberg said GW may set up a staffed office open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. that would allow students and faculty to file complaints.

"If you are a student or faculty member, you have the right to complain; but I, myself, think the scheme we are using right now is a little aggressive," Trachtenberg said.

Robinson said professors across campus take the hotline seriously and the reservations that have been expressed through GW's resolutions are not limited to a "small group."

"This line needs to be discontinued; it is contrary to University environments that are so sensitive to individual freedoms," she said.

Trachtenberg said he hopes the administration and Faculty Senate can come to an agreement by Commencement, which is May 19.

Robinson said she hopes to get an update from the administration by Friday's Faculty Senate executive board meeting.

Professor of international affairs Henry Nau said although he does not know much about the anonymous complaint line, he always finds it better for complainants to go to the person they have a problem with or a department chair to voice their opinion.

"(Anonymous complaint lines) usually cause a huge problem,"

Nau said.

Banzhaf and Robinson agreed that students or faculty members with complaints have a system of deans and other faculty members to contact who will be best suited to deal with individual problems.

Thor Halvorssen, executive director of FIRE, which is investigating the hotline, said that on the surface the complaint line looks "very troubling."

Halvorssen said GW has had an "extraordinarily troubling couple of years when it comes to individual rights and freedom of expression." The organization is also researching GW's sexual harassment policy, which has been denounced by the Faculty Senate for its anonymous complaint system.

Halvorssen declined to comment further until FIRE is finished conducting its investigation of the hotline.

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