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# GWU hot line angers faculty

By Jon Ward  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

George Washington University has set up a hot line that allows employees and students to file anonymous complaints, which some professors call an "Orwellian" system that opens the door to character assassination and threatens academic freedom.

Faculty members are outraged over the hot line.

"[It's an] Orwellian program," said Lilien Robinson, a professor of art and a member of the Faculty Senate.

Ms. Robinson said the new program "invites — even urges — anonymous complaints."

"It does not encourage fairness, trust or respect," she said. "What it does do is threaten collegiality, mutual trust [and] academic freedom."

Professors say the university already had a system to deal with faculty and student conduct, one that involved members of the university community through faculty committees and deans who oversaw different areas of conduct.

The administration said the "compliance hot line" was set up in February as part of the university's compliance program, which is meant to protect the school from lawsuits and fines over conduct issues involving students or faculty.

Under the program, any student, faculty member or university employee can call a hot line handled by Pinkerton Security Services, an independent company based in North Carolina. The hot line — devoted solely to complaints at GW — is staffed by Pinkerton 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

An operator for the hot line said all complaints received are written up and sent to the school. After receiving the complaint, the university might put it on file. If the charges are serious enough, the administration would conduct an investigation.

Pinkerton would not disclose how many calls it has received since the hot line was created.

John F. Banzhaf, a public-interest law professor, said complaints can be "based on university rules regarding drugs and alcohol, speech

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codes inside and outside the classroom, failure to foster an equal-opportunity atmosphere, alleged discrimination based on race, religion, or sexual orientation, or anything anyone thinks might even just be plain unethical."

Mr. Banzhaf said professors are alarmed by the potential for abuse; a hot line like this could be used by students or faculty with personal vendettas, he said.

Mr. Banzhaf also said those who are the subjects of a complaint may never know they have been accused — and would be unable to defend themselves — if the school simply puts the complaint on file.

"The university is very secretive," he said. "If 10 complaints had been filed against me, I'd have no way of knowing it."

He echoed Ms. Robinson's concern about the danger the hot line poses to academic freedom.

"One of the purposes of the classroom is to question, explore and confront ideas," he said.

Under this type of program, "that function is going to wither out and die," he said. "People are much more reluctant to speak out in class and voice opinions. It means the end of any kind of robust, vigorous, honest debate."

Mr. Banzhaf said he expects the university to suspend the hot line.

Pinkerton operates hot lines at the University of California's Davis, Los Angeles and San Diego branches, and at the University of Kentucky, University of Connecticut, University of North Carolina and University of New Mexico, a spokeswoman said.

"University [officials] and students are concerned about campus safety, security and compliance with codes of conduct, academic guidelines, NCAA regulations and other ethical standards," said Clifford C. Thomas, vice president of compliance services for Pinkerton. "Failure to comply with these standards and rules of conduct has resulted in large fines and penalties, public relations nightmares. Anonymous hot lines have helped significantly to uncover conduct and behavior that, if left unchecked, can result in damage to a school's reputation or worse."

The University of Kentucky operates a hot line geared toward its sports teams. Penn State has a hot line, not run by Pinkerton, that is geared toward students experiencing racial discrimination. Penn State University spokesman Tysen Kendig said the response to the hot line has been "favorable."

At George Washington University, professors were furious because they were not consulted about the hot line, despite a system of "shared governance," in which the 33-member Faculty Senate and the administration work together on personnel policy.

Faculty learned of the compliance program in February, when they received glossy brochures and wallet cards with a toll-free number in the mail at their home addresses.

The Faculty Senate has voted twice to suspend the program and the hot line until one with its input could be installed. It has also roundly criticized the program's sponsor, University Vice President and Treasurer Louis Katz.

At one Senate meeting, Mr. Katz apologized repeatedly for failing to inform faculty in advance of the hot line.

Still, he argued that the newest measures are required by federal sentencing guidelines and are "really intended to coordinate, manage and monitor all of the risks that emerge from the university's existing

compliance efforts," according to meeting notes.

Mr. Katz refused to talk with The Washington Times about the program. Colin Clasper, the university's newly appointed compliance officer, also refused to speak on the subject.

A university spokeswoman would not comment, saying that the matter is being handled internally.

"We're a big family," Gretchen King said. "Sometimes things get messy."

•*Jabeen Bhatti contributed to this report.*

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