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Columbia Cites Plagiarism by a Professor

By [KAREN W. ARENSON](#) and [ELISSA GOOTMAN](#)

A professor at [Columbia University](#)'s Teachers College who was propelled into the national spotlight when a noose was found on her office door last fall has been found to have plagiarized the work of a former colleague and two former students, the college has announced.

The college, in statements to the faculty and the news media, said an 18-month investigation into charges against the professor, Madonna G. Constantine, had determined there were "numerous instances in which she used others' work without attribution in papers she published in academic journals over the past five years."

Susan H. Fuhrman, the college's president, and Thomas James, the provost, informed the faculty of the case, and said that Dr. Constantine had the right to appeal.

The college said Dr. Constantine was being penalized, but did not say what the penalty was. A spokeswoman for the college, Marcia Horowitz, said Teachers College did not have set rules governing plagiarism or how it should be punished.

Dr. Constantine, in an e-mail message to faculty and students on Wednesday, called the investigation "biased and flawed," and said it was part of a "conspiracy and witch hunt by certain current and former members of the Teachers College community."

"I am left to wonder whether a white faculty member would have been treated in such a publicly disrespectful and disparaging manner," she wrote.

She added, "I believe that nothing that has happened to me this year is coincidental, particularly when I reflect upon the hate crime I experienced last semester involving a noose on my office door. As one of only two tenured black women full professors at Teachers College, it pains me to conclude that I have been specifically and systematically targeted."

Dr. Constantine's lawyer, Paul J. Giacomo Jr., who made Dr. Constantine's e-mail message available, said in an interview that his client was the one whose work had been plagiarized, and that she would appeal to the college's faculty advisory committee.

Paul J. Browne, the Police Department's chief spokesman, said the newly imposed sanctions on the professor would have little or no influence on what he called "an ongoing investigation" into the hanging of the noose which had been referred last fall to the hate crime unit.

Ms. Horowitz said the college initiated the investigation more than a year before the noose incident. “It had no bearing on the way the investigation was conducted, its findings or the sanctions imposed,” she said. The sanctions were first reported by The Columbia Spectator, the student newspaper.

Dr. Constantine, a professor of psychology and education who specializes in the study of how race and racial prejudice can affect clinical and educational dynamics, came to Teachers College in 1998 as an associate professor and earned tenure in 2001.

In 2006, the chairman of Dr. Constantine’s department, Suniya S. Luthar, passed along to administrators complaints that Dr. Constantine had unfairly used portions of writings by a junior colleague, Christine Yeh, as well as a number of students, Dr. Luthar said in an interview. Teachers College eventually asked Hughes Hubbard & Reed, a law firm, to investigate.

Dr. Yeh, who is now at the University of San Francisco, said in an interview Wednesday that she had left Teachers College in part because of her differences with Dr. Constantine. She called the college’s determination that there had been plagiarism “an important first step.”

“I’m really hopeful other people will come forward now,” she said. “When the initial charges were made, there were many students involved who didn’t feel they could follow up. They were too scared, and they were afraid of retribution.”

Dr. Yeh said that some of her work that had been copied concerned “indigenous healing,” or alternative methods, like acupuncture and Santeria, of dealing with medical and spiritual ailments. She said she has specialized in that subject for years.

Mr. Giacomo said that he and his client met with lawyers from Hughes Hubbard in August and that Dr. Constantine was confronted with 36 passages from her work, and similar passages from the work of others, mostly Dr. Yeh’s. He said Dr. Constantine had subsequently submitted documentation showing that the passages were her own “original work,” and “related back to prior works she had done.”

“We thought that was the end of story; we thought there was no way that they could overlook the documentation that we had presented,” he said.

In October, a noose was found on Dr. Constantine’s office door, prompting the police investigation and student protests at Teachers College, which cherishes its image as a bastion of multiculturalism. In January, Mr. Giacomo said, the college’s president and provost told Dr. Constantine that the investigation into her writings had concluded that she had used the works of others without attribution, but that if she agreed to resign, the report would not be publicized.

Mr. Giacomo said that despite objections and further documentation, the college did not change its position. He said he now considered it “not a stretch of the imagination” to suspect the noose was “an additional way of intimidating my client.”

When told of these comments, Ms. Horowitz, the spokeswoman for the college, said, “Accusations that the college had anything to do with hanging the noose are totally absurd and totally untrue.”

Dr. Luthar said that any suggestion that the inquiry was about race was “misguided and wrongheaded at best,” noting that she herself is “a woman of color,” as is Dr. Yeh.

The college, in its statement, said that Hughes Hubbard had “concluded that Professor Constantine’s explanation for the strikingly similar language was not credible.”

“In total, the investigators found a real pattern — two dozen instances of similar language from these three individuals,” added Ms. Horowitz, the spokeswoman for the college.

Sam Dillon and Thomas J. Lueck contributed reporting.

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