

Woke College Fires Adjunct Art Instructor for Showing Illustrations of Muhammad

The student newspaper also removed a letter that defended the instructor.



by Bruce Bawer

I'm always astonished when I come across the name of an American university that I've never heard of in my entire life. It happens pretty often. It's amazing how many of these places there are. Now that I've finally checked, I've

discovered that, at least according to one [list](#), there are 1,762 “chartered, licensed or accredited” institutions in the U.S. that offer “at least four-year undergraduate degrees (bachelor degrees) or postgraduate degrees (master or doctoral degrees)” and that deliver courses “predominantly in a traditional, face-to-face, non-distance education format.”

The latest such institution to find its way onto my radar is Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Established in 1854, it’s the oldest university in the state. According to Wikipedia, it’s “known for its emphasis on experiential learning, service, and social justice.” Which may explain why I’ve never heard of any of the 48 people on Wikipedia’s list of Hamline’s “notable alumni.” Nor, for that matter, have I ever heard of its current president, Fayneese S. Miller, the former director of Brown University’s Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America and founder of its Ethnic Studies Department.

Anyway, I finally became aware of Hamline as the result of a news [story](#) at *Inside Higher Education*. On Oct. 6, some poor soul who works as an adjunct instructor at Hamline – which means earning a per-course income of about \$5,000 every semester – was teaching a class in art history. The works under discussion that day included a couple of illustrations of Muhammed, one dating back to 14th-century Persia and the other to 16th-century Turkey. Because the instructor was aware that some Muslims nowadays are, shall we say, touchy about images of their prophet, she informed her students ahead of time that she’d be showing them these pictures and told them that, if they wished, they could leave the room for the duration.

That warning turned out to be insufficient. As it happened, one of the students in the course was Aram Wedatalla, president of Hamline’s Muslim Student Association (MSA), who went straight to the top with a complaint about the adjunct’s vile action. The next day, Miller, the university president,

met with Wedatalla, and Patti Kersten, the dean of students, phoned Wedatalla to apologize for the traumatic experience she'd endured. Later, in an interview with Hamline's student newspaper, the *Oracle*, Wedatalla recounted her response to the adjunct's actions: "I'm like, 'this can't be real.'... As a Muslim, and a Black person, I don't feel like I belong, and I don't think I'll ever belong in a community where they don't value me as a member, and they don't show the same respect that I show them."

That was only the beginning. On Oct. 10, members of the MSA and their adviser, Nur Mood – who is also Hamline's assistant director of social justice programs and strategic relations – "met with members of the administration ... to discuss the incident and how to move forward." Mood later told the *Oracle* that the adjunct's action was something she'd never expected to happen at Hamline "in a million years." While acknowledging that the administration had been spreading around "a lot of apologies," Mood complained that university officials had been insufficiently focused on "the healing process."

At some point during all this trauma, the administration invited Jaylani Hussein, head of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) – a notorious terrorist-group front – to lead a "community conversation" on Hamline's campus about the evils of Islamophobia. On Nov. 7, David Everett, Hamline's associate vice president for inclusive excellence – yes, that's his title – publicly stated that the adjunct's actions had been "undeniably inconsiderate, disrespectful, and Islamophobic"; two days later, he announced that the adjunct's employment had been terminated.

There's still more. In a Dec. 6 letter to the *Oracle*, Mark Berkson, who teaches religion at Hamline, actually dared to defend the adjunct, pointing out that "Muslims have created and enjoyed figural representations of Muhammad throughout much of the history of Islam in some parts of the Islamic

world.” Alas, shortly after posting Berkson’s letter on its website, the *Oracle*’s editors took it down – because, they explained, some members of the “Hamline community” claimed that it had “caused them harm.”

And on and on it went. On Dec. 9, Everett and Miller, Hamline’s president, wrote a letter to the university community affirming that “respect for the observant Muslim students in that classroom should have superseded academic freedom.” They added: “Academic freedom is very important, but it does not have to come at the expense of care and decency toward others.” Needless to say, this kind of logic could be used to justify any and all limits on free speech. Plus a fact, to limit free speech in order to avoid offending Muslims is, quite simply, to replace American constitutional liberty with a concept of freedom rooted in sharia.

During these weeks, while various worthies were making public statements about the earthquake that had taken place in that classroom on Oct. 6, one voice was conspicuous by its absence: that of the adjunct herself. The media that have covered this story haven’t provided her name; nor has she come forward. But if Hamline’s undergraduate course [listings](#) for Fall 2022 can be relied on, there’s only one course that sounds remotely like the one in question. It’s World Art (ARTH 1100-1), taught by Erika Lopez Prater. Classes were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. – which means that she had to drag herself out of bed at about 6 in the morning twice a week – in ice-cold Minnesota! – so she could race to Hamline and expound on medieval art before sunrise.

If Lopez Prater is indeed the teacher who was fired for showing her students artwork, why hasn’t she come forward? It occurred to me that perhaps, like many adjuncts I’ve known, she cobbles together her annual income, such as it is, by running from one college campus to another – teaching a course here, a course there – and that, having lost her gig at Hamline, she’s more desperate than ever not to endanger her

jobs elsewhere by going public. Sure enough, it turns out that Lopez Prater [teaches](#) art history at Macalester College (also in St. Paul) and has recently been an [adjunct](#) at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

Ms. Lopez Prater, I urge you: if you're the woman at the center of this controversy, please come forward. Speak up. Have your say. You're a serious but criminally underpaid educator who's been outrageously wronged by fatuous, cowardly administrators who are lavishly compensated for enforcing identity-group despotism. The blow they've struck against free speech and liberal education can't be allowed to stand. If you weigh in on this absurdity, you'll be a heroine to millions. In any case, there surely must be better ways for you to go forward with your life than to stay silent so you can keep earning a pauper's wage.

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