

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY



March 22, 2007

To: The University Board on Tenure and Promotion

From: Chuck Suchar, Dean *CS*
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Re: Norm Finkelstein

Dr. Norm Finkelstein, Assistant Professor of Political Science, has applied for promotion to Associate Professor with tenure. The Department of Political Science, as noted in its majority report, voted 9 in favor and 3 against supporting Prof. Finkelstein's application for promotion with tenure. A minority report was submitted along with the departmental report. The department also submitted an addendum to the majority report as a response to the minority report.

The College Personnel Committee (CPC), by a unanimous vote of 5-0, also recommends promotion to Associate Professor with tenure. On balance, the CPC views Prof. Finkelstein's contributions as a teacher and scholar as meeting the College's criteria and standards for promotion and tenure. I, however, do not concur in this recommendation and withhold my support of this application.

Prof. Finkelstein received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1988. He joined the faculty in the Department of Political Science at DePaul as an Assistant Professor in the Fall of 2001 having spent previous years as an adjunct and visiting professor at Hunter College as well as other institutions.

Dr. Finkelstein teaches a variety of courses in the political science department in the areas of political theory as well as courses that focus on the Israel-Palestine Conflict, international politics, and he has also taught courses in various areas of the Liberal Studies program. These include courses in the Focal Point Seminar program, the Honors Program and a section of the Sophomore Multicultural Seminar. Student course evaluations reveal that he is a skilled teacher. The CPC is particularly impressed with Dr. Finkelstein's consistently high course evaluations and the apparent positive impact he has made on scores of students throughout the years he has been at DePaul – this in a department with very high average scores on student course evaluations and a reputation for excellence in teaching.

The CPC notes the many comments by students that reflect a “transformative” experience in his classes. The Committee was impressed with how the strong student course evaluations reflected student views of Prof. Finkelstein's skills in promoting student discussions over very difficult, controversial and complex topics, as well as the depth and

breadth of his knowledge. It is noteworthy that no one on the College Personnel Committee, the members of the Political Science Department, including the members of the Political Science department that issued the minority report, disputes Prof. Finkelstein's skills and abilities as an instructor. I am in agreement with the majority view of the value of Dr. Finkelstein's contributions as a classroom instructor.

The College Personnel Committee was less than unanimous in its overall assessment of Prof. Finkelstein's scholarly contributions. While, on balance, the voting members of the Committee were persuaded that his scholarship, while extremely controversial was, to use the words of one member of the committee, "...consistent with the academy and [gave] evidence of a passionate scholarship of high standard", there were some reservations. The members of the College Personnel Committee unanimously supported the view [and that they wished me to express in this report] that Prof. Finkelstein's scholarship troubled them by its tone and by its frequent personal attacks that seemed to many to be needlessly inflammatory – thus agreeing with that claim in the minority report. To many members of the committee, however, the scholarship was, on balance, sufficiently noteworthy and praiseworthy to merit their support for the application for promotion and tenure. Their vote in favor of granting promotion and tenure reflects their overall perspective that Prof. Finkelstein's scholarly work has been deemed by his colleagues and external reviewers as being of sufficient value and importance to merit his promotion and tenure.

I find it difficult to share their net assessment of Professor Finkelstein's scholarly contributions. My own estimation of the tone and substance of his scholarship is that a considerable amount of it is inconsistent with DePaul's Vincentian values, most particularly our institutional commitment to respect the dignity of the individual and to respect the rights of others to hold and express different intellectual positions – what I take to be one significant meaning of what we term Vincentian "personalism" as well as our commitment to diversity.

In agreement with the minority report, I find the personal attacks in many of Dr. Finkelstein's published books to border on character assassination and, in my opinion, they embody a strategy clearly aimed at destroying the reputation of many who oppose his views. I find this to be an unfortunate characteristic of his scholarship – one that threatens some basic tenets of discourse within an academic community – to conduct inquiry with civility and without undue or unnecessary personal injury or attack.

The departmental minority report cites Dr. Finkelstein's personal and reputation demeaning attacks on Alan Dershowitz, Benny Morris, and the holocaust authors Eli Wiesel and Jerzy Kosinski. My own examination of Prof. Finkelstein's works corroborates the minority report's claims and conclusions in this regard. My reading of Dr. Finkelstein's work, especially *The Holocaust Industry*, where in one chapter alone Goldhagen, Morris, Wiesel, Kosinski and many others are collectively attacked as "hoaxsters and huxters", typifies his apparent penchant of reducing an argument and oppositional views to the inevitable personal and reputation damaging attack, demeaning those with whom he disagrees. It is my view that DePaul's commitment to personalism

basically prohibits addressing individuals with the kind of invective or insult that I find all too common in Dr. Finkelstein's scholarship where the dignity of individuals with whom he disagrees are routinely disrespected.

While the CPC found this aspect of Dr. Finkelstein's scholarship to be troubling but not sufficient to merit rejection of his application for promotion and tenure, I must say that I find this very characteristic aspect of his scholarship to compromise its value and find it to be reflective of an ideologue and polemicist who has a rather hurtful and mean-spirited sub-text to his critical scholarship – not only to prove his point and others wrong but, also in my opinion, in the process, to impugn their veracity, honor, motives, reputations and/or their dignity. I see this as a very damaging threat to civil discourse in a University and in society in general. Such inflammatory polemics in no way further the civil discourse and serious intellectual inquiry that the Academy stands for to say nothing for the deeply shared DePaul University and Vincentian value of “personalism” – respect for the dignity of the individual. I also wish to note that Dr. Finkelstein's tendency to personally attack those who disagree with him is also borne out in his behavior with his colleagues.

In a memo I received on January 22, 2007, the General Consul's office informed me that it had learned from DePaul's Political Science Department that Professor Finkelstein had indicated he was considering filing a law suit against DePaul and his fellow political science professors who had authored the minority report. Disagreements over the value of his work seem to prompt immediate threats and personal attacks. This does not auger well for a College and University that has a long-standing culture where respect for the dignity of all members of the community and where values of collegiality are paramount.

The College Personnel Committee viewed Dr. Finkelstein's service record as being mixed. Those who accepted the departmental perspective that his contributions as a public intellectual largely established his record of service in his probationary period were satisfied with his service record. A few were vocal in supporting this service record as a significant contribution to DePaul. Several members of the Personnel Committee wished to clearly indicate, however, that they found a service record largely configured through such contributions not to be very convincing. I agree with this latter perspective. Beyond service on departmental committees, I find Dr. Finkelstein's service contributions to the College and University to be unimpressive. There has been no service on College or University-level committees to my knowledge.

In sum, the College Personnel Committee, by its vote and evaluation, supports Dr. Finkelstein's request for promotion and tenure. They find his teaching to be exceptional and believe that his scholarship, on balance, meets and, for some, exceeds the minimum standards of the College. The views on his service record are mixed with some supporting the departmental evaluation of his record as a public intellectual as important while others view his service record outside the department as less remarkable. The reservations expressed in this report that reflect the more difficult and contentious aspects of his scholarship that I view as inconsistent with institutional values prevent me from sharing in their support of his application for promotion and tenure.