

Senate Resolution in Support of Dr. Audrey Truschke

Background

Rutgers has a long history as a leader in the defense of academic freedom from politically motivated attacks. Academic freedom, without reservation, in the classroom, in areas of scholarship, and in the public sphere, is essential to our mission as a higher education institution, which includes the promotion of critical inquiry. Academic freedom not only protects individual professors and students but, indeed, the very heart of higher education. It is the foundation of our ability to set research agendas, produce scholarship, and teach effectively. Academic freedom has come under fire from many quarters, and recently we have witnessed a number of especially dangerous attacks at Rutgers and nationally. These attacks require a forceful, public response from the university.

Since the fall of 2015, one of our faculty members, Dr. Audrey Truschke, Associate Professor of South Asian history at Rutgers-Newark, has been subjected to a range of hateful attacks. The ever increasing intensity and vitriol of these attacks require a strong public defense from Rutgers of academic freedom in general and of the academic freedom of Professor Truschke, in particular. These attacks have come largely from groups and individuals who advocate a nationalist ideology of Hindu supremacy (known as Hindutva or Hindu nationalism). The attacks on Professor Truschke have included violent threats to her and her family, coordinated smear campaigns, and attempts to infringe on both her teaching and research. The cumulative effect has been to chill academic freedom, for Professor Truschke, for others who support her, and for those who may fear becoming the next target.

An especially virulent campaign was launched against Professor Truschke in early March 2021. This campaign called for the Rutgers administration to sanction Professor Truschke and curtail her teaching. The Rutgers administration rejected these calls. We applaud the administration's resolve, and we now seek to condemn this attack for what it was: a hateful, organized, politically motivated attempt to infringe on academic freedom and dissuade Professor Truschke's commitment to investigating and teaching a diverse variety of viewpoints in South Asian history. The fallout from this campaign is ongoing for Professor Truschke, especially in terms of fear for the safety of her and her family. We especially condemn the violent threats she has received. We also recognize that academic freedom requires an environment in which scholars not only survive but can thrive. Pursuant to that

end, we join in the effort to cultivate an environment of unwavering support for academic freedom at Rutgers.

The attacks on Professor Truschke appear to have originated largely from outside Rutgers University, although the attackers have sometimes impersonated the voices of members of the Rutgers community. They also have sought to radicalize a small group of Rutgers students. We reject such attempts to speak for and target our students, as well as our faculty. Going forward, we strive to create an environment where our students can learn and express their identities free of right-wing hate.

Resolution

The Executive Committee of the University Senate on behalf of the entire Senate hereby express our strong support for the academic freedom of every member of our community and for that of Professor Truschke in particular, in light of the heinous attacks to which she has been subjected.