

“Defend Dr. Peter Boghossian of Portland State University”

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

9 January 2019

The Oregon Association of Scholars strongly condemns Portland State University’s disciplinary actions against Dr. Peter Boghossian. Portland State seeks to punish Dr. Boghossian for revealing the shameful lack of standards in “grievance studies” departments and programs. Dr. Boghossian’s work is admirable, necessary, and entirely within the range of protected academic freedom.

In October 2018, Dr. Boghossian and two colleagues revealed that they had successfully placed hoax articles in several peer-reviewed academic journals devoted to identity grievances and ideological agitation. The acceptance of the articles is a powerful indictment of the “grievance studies” departments and programs that now dominate contemporary social sciences and humanities schools in American higher education. Stress-testing is used in many fields, including banking and disaster preparedness, to determine the strength and reliability of safeguards. In this case the targeted journals failed the tests. Defenders of these fields of study were understandably chagrined, but it is entirely inappropriate for Portland State University to respond by attempting to punish the whistleblower.

Shortly after Dr. Boghossian revealed the hoax, Portland State University informed him that it was investigating complaints that he had “fabricated” data. Such “fabrication,” of course, is the very definition of a hoax or satire article. The university also told him that he had engaged in research with “human subjects”—the odd term by which the university referred to the journal reviewers who approved publication of the articles. Most farcically, the university said that Dr. Boghossian had failed to win approval from the university’s “Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee” for an article on “rape culture” among frisky friends in dog parks in Portland because it constituted “research into animal behavior, whether factual or not.”

In December, a review panel concluded that the human subjects review charge had merit because “the methodology for the project included interacting with living individuals (i.e., journal editors and reviewers).” While the investigation into alleged fabrication of data is ongoing, Dr. Boghossian has already been punished on the human subjects charge by an order to “cease any current or planned human subjects research that has no submitted IRB [Institutional Review Board] protocol.” The university also said that “no sponsored research proposal or program will be approved by Portland State University where you [Dr. Boghossian] are a principal investigator, collaborator or contributor in any substantial manner.”

These charges are bogus and ideologically motivated. Journal reviewers and editors have *never* been considered part of human subjects research protocols, not only because the scholar's interactions with them are unforeseeable and separate from the research but also because the reviewers are anonymous. More generally, the hoax or satire based on concocted data *that is later revealed to be such* as part of the research is a fundamental and long-standing method of intellectual inquiry in the Western liberal tradition. Portland State University's cowardly administrators seem ready to toss this tradition away to appease radical faculty, twelve of whom published an anonymous letter under the Orwellian name "Pro-Educational Editorial Collective" in the student newspaper in November charging that Dr. Boghossian violated "acceptable norms of research".

The Oregon Association of Scholars calls for the bizarre proceedings against Dr. Boghossian to cease immediately and for his research rights to be restored. It calls for him to be given a letter of commendation for his research efforts and the university's Office of Communications to promote his work.

The OAS further calls for the Board of Trustees of Portland State University and state legislators to declare that the sense of the Trustees and the Legislature is that all public universities should affirm academic freedom, specifically including the right to conduct hoaxes such as Dr. Boghossian's. They should consider creating an independent committee to recommend reforms to strengthen academic freedom in Oregon public universities.

As the OAS has previously stated, Oregon state universities and colleges must remain neutral with respect to the broad variety of reasonable and civic viewpoints espoused by Oregonians. There is an urgent need for state colleges and universities, as well as their private counterparts, to reaffirm the fundamental principle of viewpoint neutrality in higher education in an era when faculty and administration seek to institutionalize their own viewpoints and suppress others.

"Yet again, a prominent Oregon university has violated the trust that the public has placed in it by using its authority to censor and punish a scholar because of his viewpoint," said Dr. Bruce Gilley, President of the Oregon Association of Scholars and a Professor of Political Science at Portland State University.

"Oregon legislators should take action to strengthen accountability at public colleges and universities for upholding viewpoint neutrality and to protect academic freedom rights in the face of censorious administrators and faculty," Gilley said.

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