

Challenge to law faculty dean

UWI hunts whistleblower

RHONDA KRYSTAL RAMBALLY

The University of West Indies, St Augustine, is investigating who leaked confidential correspondence to the media which challenged the re-appointment of the dean of the Faculty of Law.

The probe follows an exclusive story in yesterday's T&T Guardian, which highlighted a series of complaints and allegations against Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine and a challenge to her four-year re-appointment.

Several pieces of correspondence detailing alleged victimisation, along with letters by lecturers expressing discontent over Antoine's re-appointment, which they said was unlawful according to The UWI's statutes and ordinances, were provided to the T&T Guardian.

Yesterday there was said to be suspicion and finger-pointing at the campus as university officials searched for the source of the leak.

A meeting to be held by the West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT), the union representing lecturers, to address the claims of victimisation and secret recording of conversations was also rescheduled.

Efforts to contact UWI pro vice-chancellor Sir Hilary Beckles on the matter were unsuccessful, but the newspaper understands the issue was drawn to Sir Hilary's attention as it was major topic of discussion at law faculty's across the region.

Meanwhile, at yesterday's Second Oil and Gas Law conference hosted by the faculty at the Hilton Trinidad, Antoine confronted the T&T Guardian



Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, left, speaks with Tonya Rowley during the Second Oil and Gas Law Conference at Hilton Trinidad, St Ann's, yesterday. PHOTO: ANISTO ALVES

photographer to indicate she was not friends with former prime minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar as reported, but was friends with Sharon Rowley, wife of Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley. Mrs Rowley is an attorney.

Antoine also said she was aware of who (name called) was behind the story.

Antoine was appointed in 2013 and a May 1, 2017, press release by The UWI confirmed her re-appointment for another four-year term.

It stated, "The University Council, which held its meeting at the Cave Hill Campus on April 27, is the governing body of the regional university and exercises powers such as making appointments as authorised by The UWI's Charter and Statutes, managing finances and all business affairs of the University."

Responding to lecturers' concerns over her re-appointment

principal has conducted consultations within the faculty; sub-rule 4A clarified that this requirement also applies to any extension of term granted to an incumbent dean; and sub-rule 5 mandates advertisement of any vacancy in the office of dean throughout the university, and even externally, if deemed necessary by the vice-chancellor.

Bulkan said he viewed the apparent breach if the statutes with "profound alarm and disappointment."

But Antoine does have the support of lecturer Alicia Elias-Roberts. Speaking during yesterday's Oil and Gas conference, Elias-Roberts said she had no issue with Antoine's tenure.

In contradiction to Copeland's own comments and that of other lecturers, Elias-Roberts said, "The principal met with senior lecturers, he consulted with the senior lecturers of the faculty about the re-appointment of the dean, so that is within the statutes and ordinance of the university."

"And in any case I would just like to underscore that if you're being re-appointed, then you're not responsible for the consultative process, that would be the university's administration. I support the Dean's re-appointment and I think she is a visionary leader and she adds to UWI's brand and quality," she said.

Asked if the issue surrounding Antoine was being blown out of proportion, Elias-Roberts said: "I think maybe communication is the issue. If there are problems with a few lecturers then maybe you have to nip things like that in the bud and communicate with them more effectively on the ground before you go outside."

earlier this week, Antoine said she was unaware of any legitimate concerns that "some" staff members may have and was confident that The UWI would have followed all appropriate procedures and protocols. She dismissed any allegation of victimisation but admitted to the secret taping of a conversation with another lecturer, in the event that she would be misquoted.

UWI campus principal Prof Brian Copeland had said the issues raised by the lecturers were being addressed and some had been dismissed "as there was a lack of understanding of the (re-appointment) process."

In a letter to Copeland dated May 5, senior lecturer Dr Arif Bulkan said the re-appointment was made in violation of The UWI's Charter and Statutes.

He drew reference to Statute 12, which provided in sub-rule 1 that deans of faculties shall be appointed only after the campus