



## **The Perfect Academic Storm**

A few months ago, the AAUP reported to its members on the results of the largest investigation we have undertaken in half a century. We were faced with fundamental violations of academic freedom and tenure not just at one school but across an entire region. Under the cover of unsubstantiated declarations of various versions of financial exigency, university administrators at five institutions engaged in a nearly universal departure from (or in some cases complete abandonment of) personnel and other policies. It has been called the storm after the storm, or the perfect academic storm. I am referring to the aftereffects of Hurricane Katrina on universities in the New Orleans area.

Many tenured faculty were fired with scant notice, no meaningful due process, no stated reasons, and no appeal save to the very administrators who released them. Faculty were not consulted about these actions or given an opportunity to suggest alternatives. Some found out they had already been taken off payroll and health care. Departments and programs were closed without appropriate review. While a number of institutions had suffered serious damage from the hurricane, we found no justification for this wholesale abandonment of due process and shared governance. Indeed, as the report eloquently declares, this is exactly the kind of challenge that requires wide consultation and full participation by the faculty before drastic actions are taken.

We believe all members of the higher education community need to know the story of how the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina was unnecessarily compounded by administrative fiat. That is why we are sending this e-mail.

The report is a warning to all of us about how not to handle a crisis, a warning as well about the dangers we face if our shared governance guarantees are not strengthened. Four administrations were censured at our annual meeting in June because of their post-Katrina actions. Negotiations continue in order to gain justice for New Orleans faculty and restore due process to the region.

The full report is available [online](#).

Cary Nelson  
AAUP President