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Los Angeles Times

June 15, 2012

Researcher sues UCLA, says his firing was political

UCLA researcher sues in an attempt to retain the position he's held for 35 years. He argues that he was targeted for his work on pollution and secondhand smoke.



James Enstrom is suing UCLA in an attempt to retain the position he's held for 35 years. The lawsuit says UCLA administrators "discriminated against Dr. Enstrom based on his ideological and political affiliations and sought to purge an academic dissenter from their ranks." (UCLA / March 16, 2007)

By Larry Gordon, Los Angeles Times

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A controversial researcher on air pollution and secondhand cigarette smoke is suing [UCLA](#) to get his position back, claiming that his firing was an illegal effort to quash academic dissent and protect politically correct views.

James Enstrom, a nontenured researcher in the UCLA School of Public Health, has been involved in a series of administrative appeals in trying to keep the position he held for about 35 years. With those UC avenues exhausted, he filed a lawsuit Wednesday in federal court in Los Angeles against the university and its administrators.

He is being represented by lawyers from the American Center for Law and Justice, a politically conservative organization that has been active in, among other things, opposing public funding for abortions.

Some of Enstrom's research provoked much debate as he suggested that the negative health impacts of some pollutants had been exaggerated to impose draconian rules on industry. He also contends he is a victim of retribution for exposing wrongdoing on the state air pollution board. He previously encountered opposition to his research, funded in part by the tobacco industry, that said the health risks of secondhand cigarette smoke were not as bad as other health advocates had portrayed them.

UCLA administrators "discriminated against Dr. Enstrom based on his ideological and political affiliations and sought to purge an academic dissenter from their ranks," according to the lawsuit, which also is seeking financial damages and reinstatement.

The university on Thursday strongly disputed Enstrom's allegations and pledged to fight the case in court.

"UCLA zealously protects the intellectual independence of members of our academic community and has long maintained that Enstrom's political and scientific views and outside activities were not considered during his reappointment process," said a statement issued by the university.

Enstrom's grievance was given a lengthy and fair review at UC, "including a hearing before a retired judge serving as an independent hearing officer," the statement added. The grievance process concluded in August 2011 and Enstrom's appointment ends this month.

larry.gordon@latimes.com

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