



NEWS RELEASE

From New York State Inspector General
Catherine Leahy Scott

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 6, 2013
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INSPECTOR GENERAL FINDS IMPROPER CONDUCT BY TWO INSTRUCTORS AT SUNY CORTLAND AND THAT INTERNAL INVESTIGATION BY COLLEGE OFFICIALS WAS INSUFFICIENT

State University of New York Cortland Instructor Sarah Zipp misrepresented her academic status when she sought and received a salary increase and faculty reappointment, according to a [report](#) released today by New York State Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott. Additionally, Sarah Zipp and her husband, Aaron Zipp, also a SUNY Cortland instructor, created an apparent conflict of interest by maintaining professional ties with a former employer, a student travel service, after SUNY Cortland and the firm entered into a joint agreement.

“The SUNY system is among the most respected in public higher education,” said Inspector General Scott. “There is no place at SUNY for faculty who make misrepresentations when seeking pay raises and reappointment, or who engage in activities that appear to conflict with their college responsibilities. Unfortunately, that is what this investigation uncovered, and our institutions must be vigilant in ensuring that such conduct is both addressed and prevented.”

The Inspector General’s investigation determined that Sarah Zipp, an instructor in the Sport Management Department at SUNY Cortland, falsely stated she was enrolled in a doctoral program at a university in Cologne, Germany, when she applied for and received a salary increase in the fall of 2009. Sarah Zipp further misrepresented her status with the German university when she successfully sought faculty reappointment in the spring of 2010 and when she applied for a second salary increase several months later. Moreover, SUNY Cortland officials failed to sufficiently investigate or address Sarah Zipp’s misrepresentations after they were brought to their attention.

The Inspector General’s investigation further revealed that Sarah Zipp and her husband Aaron Zipp, also an instructor in the Sport Management Department, previously worked for LanCon, a company that provides students educational trips to Europe, and that they continued their affiliation with LanCon after their hiring by SUNY Cortland and after the college and the firm entered into a joint agreement. Apparent improprieties included LanCon payments to Aaron Zipp for his participation in trips in 2009 and 2010, for which he also acted as the official representative of SUNY Cortland and student participants. The Inspector General’s investigation concluded that SUNY Cortland officials also did not sufficiently investigate this apparent conflict of interest.

The Inspector General is recommending that SUNY Cortland strengthen its procedures governing faculty pay raises and reappointments to ensure, among other things, that possible misrepresentations be thoroughly investigated. SUNY Cortland also should train administrators in recognizing and avoiding conflicts of interest, and ensure that Aaron Zipp and Sarah Zipp do not represent SUNY Cortland or its students in future LanCon dealings.

Inspector General Scott is referring this matter to the New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics for review. Click [here](#) for a copy of the report.

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