

## Gamow: Firing profs isn't that hard

**By R. Igor Gamow**  
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How hard and how expensive is it to fire a tenured professor?

The surprising answer, based on my almost 50 years at the University of Colorado, is that it is neither hard nor expensive to fire a tenured professor. I should know, since I have been recently fired. Well, it was pretty expensive for me, but not the university, since it has a team of lawyers in house.

The previous CU president, Betsy Hoffman, numerous times stated that it would cost CU some \$3 million to fire Professor Ward Churchill. Was she just blowing smoke? Perhaps. It might cost \$3 million to fire a football coach, but a mere professor, never. CU did not fire Professor Churchill because it simply did not "want" to. Apparently, this may soon change!

CU has three well-used strategies to eliminate tenured professors. The first one is to freeze or almost freeze their salaries. The second strategy is to give them unpalatable courses to teach. The third strategy is to move them into administration, which of course explains why CU is in hot water so often. If these three strategies fail and the faculty member just plainly refuses to leave, CU can formally fire him or her.

Apparently only two professors in CU's long history have chosen this last pathway — I and the former UCB aerospace engineering sciences chairman (who had, in fact, hired me in 1967), Mahinder Uberoi. It is interesting to note that failing CU presidents operate under a different set of rules. Our past three CU presidents made a bundle of money — two of them are still making a bundle doing who knows what — from CU.

I would like to now compare and contrast five past and present, CU professors, including me, in terms of their duties. They are the late Professor Stan Brakhage of film studies, the late Professor Howard Higman of sociology, Professor Emeritus Leonard Lewin of electrical and computer engineering, the late Professor George Gamow (my dad) of physics and I, Professor R. Igor Gamow, formerly of the department of chemical and biological engineering.

We were all well-known tenured research professors on the CU-Boulder campus. By research professor, I include all tenured CU professors since we all are, in principle, required to produce scholarly work that is known and respected worldwide throughout our careers. [*Addition that was included in Gamow's original letter sent to the Daily Camera: None research universities and colleges, in sharp contrast to CU, actually discourage their faculty from doing scholarly work because they believe it distracts them from their primary mission of classroom teaching.*] We all had worldwide intellectual reputations and with only one exception, me, none of us had a Ph.D. or had gone through the lengthy tenure review process so often described in the local press.

In fact, professors Brakhage and Lewin only had high school diplomas! We rarely, if ever, were in the classroom more than six hours a week, and we rarely if ever taught classes in the summer. The position we all held was and still is one of the most coveted and privileged positions in the world, that is, a "research professor." Howard Higman once told me that a tenured research professor position is one only "second to the Pope." I agree.

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