Two Former Professors Cite Unfairness in Tenure Track

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will be a trial," Altman said.

Altman said he expected Kalonji to win the case against MIT. "Some of the leading materials scientists in the country have already stepped forward and indicated that Professor Kalonji was as qualified or more qualified" than male faculty members who were granted tenure, Altman said.

Prove history of discrimination

"Kalonji's denial of tenure is part of a long pattern and practice of discrimination against women by the department and by MIT," wrote Altman in the Jan. 14 complaint.

"The allegation is, and we will attempt to prove, that the Department of Materials Science has had a long-standing practice of discriminating against women," Altman said.

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Nicole Herbots, a former professor in the department, said that "none of the main crises about being a woman in the department was being invisible." Herbots described a "conscious attitude present in most of the faculty" that systematically excluded women and minorities.

When faculty members would go out for lunch, they were "always skipping my office," Herbots said, as an example of the type of behavior she observed. There was an "unconscious barrier" placed between the women and the men of the faculty that prevented, among other things, the passing of important information, Herbots said.

Kalonji's lawsuit also cites several examples of discriminatory behavior. "Flemings effectively diverted Kalonji's research for approximately three years from basic research that would further her path to tenure, to applied research for a company that had donated money to MIT," the complaint said. "Additionally, the department did not provide Kalonji with lab space and support during the early stages of her career."

For the tenure decision, Flemings solicited comments and letters, and particularly encouraged negative comments, from people who were not listed by Professor Kalonji in her tenure application," the complaint said.

Case history

Kalonji, who received both her bachelor and doctorate degrees from MIT, was hired by MIT as an assistant professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering in 1982. In 1986, she was promoted to associate professor.

"In December, 1988, the department voted to recommend to the dean [former Dean of Engineering Gerald L. Wilson] against granting tenure to Kalonji, despite the fact that her qualifications were and are superior to those of other comparable males in the department," the complaint said.

"In April of 1989, I filed a grievance with MIT's Dean of Engineering after my department voted not to recommend me for tenure," Kalonji said in the MCAD complaint. For the next two years, Wilson and two committees he appointed considered whether Kalonji had been treated unfairly by her department in the tenure decision.

According to the lawsuit, the first committee concluded that the tenure decision had been "unacceptably unfair." The committee also found that the departmental environment is "less supportive of women" than men and "tends to disfavor the career development of women."

A second committee, however, recommended to Wilson that Kalonji not be awarded tenure. The second committee "applied a higher and different standard to Kalonji than had been applied to comparable males," the lawsuit said, and it "relied upon information discriminatorily gathered by the department."

Wilson informed Kalonji on Jan. 15, 1991, that she would not be granted tenure. Kalonji subsequently asked President Charles M. Vest to review the decision, and on June 11, 1991, was informed by Provost Mark S. Wrighton that MIT would not further review her tenure denial.

Kalonji left MIT in August 1990 and is currently a professor at the University of Washington in Seattle.