

PRESS RELEASE

Human Rights Defense Center
For Immediate Release



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Temple University Acts on Ethics Complaint Filed Against Authors of Private Prison Study

Philadelphia, PA – In response to an ethics complaint filed against Temple University professors [Simon Hakim](#) and [Erwin A. Blackstone](#), a Temple official recently wrote that she had conducted an examination of the complaint and the University took action as a result.

The complaint, filed in June 2013 by Alex Friedmann, associate director of the [Human Rights Defense Center](#), noted that when Hakim and Blackstone initially released the results of their research, which found substantial cost savings and comparable quality of service by privately-operated prisons, their working paper failed to disclose that they had received funding from the nation’s three largest private prison companies.

Further, Hakim and Blackstone submitted editorials to newspapers in at least five states regarding their research, most of which did not disclose the funding source of their study.

The ethics complaint alleged that the failure to adequately disclose the private prison study had received funding from the private prison industry violated several University policies related to academic research. The complaint also noted the study relied upon American Correctional Association (ACA) standards to evaluate quality of service at private prisons without disclosing the close financial and leadership connections between the ACA and private prison firms.

The complaint against professors Hakim and Blackstone resulted in coverage by a variety of news media agencies, including the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#), [Philadelphia Weekly](#), [Inside Higher Ed](#) and [In These Times](#), as well as [The Temple News](#), the University’s paper.

Dr. Michele Masucci, Interim Vice Provost for Research at Temple, stated in a July 2, 2014 [letter](#) that she had concluded an examination of the ethics complaint.

“As you know,” she wrote, “the working paper was withdrawn and is no longer widely available. Additionally, University records do not reveal that it received grant funds” for the private prison study, and thus “many months ago we directed that correction be made to any publication that inaccurately attributed Temple’s connection to this work.”

Further, Dr. Masucci stated the University would “address its conclusions, including any action specific [sic] pertaining to the respondents, individually with Drs. Hakim and Blackstone.”

“Although it took Temple officials over a year to act on my ethics complaint, I’m pleased that they realized the serious nature of the complaint and disassociated the University from the private prison study, and that the working paper was withdrawn,” said Friedmann. “Of course, it would have been better had Temple released the results of its investigation, such as whether Hakim and Blackstone owned stock in the private prison firms that funded their study. It’s ironic that the University has not fully disclosed the outcome of its investigation into my complaint against two of its faculty members who failed to fully disclose the source of their research funding.”

Previously, a number of groups had contacted Temple University concerning the ethics complaint and private prison study, including a [letter](#) from three Philadelphia-based locals of the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME). In addition, more than a dozen organizations, including the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, National Lawyers Guild and Southern Center for Human Rights, submitted a [joint letter](#) to Temple regarding the study and ethics complaint in May 2014; the letter was coordinated by In the Public Interest.

ColorOfChange, the nation’s largest online civil rights organization, has launched a [campaign](#) targeting Hakim and Blackstone’s study, using the tag line “The best research money can buy?”

“Temple President Neil Theobald has a choice to make – uphold the University’s commitment to ethical and honest research or allow for-profit prisons to corrupt Temple’s academic integrity,” said ColorOfChange executive director Rashad Robinson. “The University’s recent response attempts to sweep matters under the rug, but we demand better. Thousands of ColorOfChange members are calling on Pres. Theobald to take definitive action and prevent this type of unethical research in the future.”

Meanwhile, U.C. Berkeley researcher Chris Petrella has issued an [open letter](#) debunking some of the [flawed methodology](#) of Hakim and Blackstone’s research, calling on Corrections Corporation of America to stop citing their study. CCA and private prison firm GEO Group – both of which funded the study, along with Management & Training Corp. – have incestuously cited it in their promotional materials, on their websites and in public statements.

The Human Rights Defense Center, founded in 1990 and based in Lake Worth, Florida, is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting human rights in U.S. detention facilities. HRDC publishes *Prison Legal News* (PLN), a monthly magazine that includes reports, reviews and analysis of court rulings and news related to prisoners’ rights and criminal justice issues. PLN has around 9,000 subscribers nationwide and operates a website (www.prisonlegalnews.org) that includes a comprehensive database of prison and jail-related articles, news reports, court rulings, verdicts, settlements and related documents.

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