

Affirmative Action Ruffles University Again

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The notion of affirmative action is at the center of another UCSC hiring controversy, marking the second instance this year in which faculty members have charged that affirmative action policies were twisted and confused as a faculty hire was approved.

UCSC choral director Paul Vorwerk, an internationally renowned conductor who performs regularly at the university and in the community, was recently turned down for the permanent UCSC job he now holds on a temporary basis. Vorwerk has 20 years of teaching experience and charges that, in his case, affirmative action principles were misused. Ironically, UCSC faculty affirmative action coordinator Julia Armstrong does not dispute his charge. Vorwerk, she conceded, may have been the victim of a "miscommunication" between her office and that of Sherwood Dudley, chair of the UCSC music department.

According to various sources, after a two-year national search for a permanent UCSC choral director, the music board voted to hire Vorwerk. Dudley announced Vorwerk's position this April 8. But after reconsideration, the music board took another vote, rescinded its offer to Vorwerk and chose recent Ph.D. Nicole Paiment instead. Paiment has only one year of teaching experience to Vorwerk's 20. According to Vorwerk, Dudley told him that Armstrong had challenged the criteria on which the board made its original recommendation. Because she was a woman and

because the job description detailed a person "of distinction or promise of distinction," Paiment's potential for experience had to be considered equal to Vorwerk's actual experience.

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"I embrace affirmative action hiring procedures," stated Vorwerk. However, he added, "At face value this is disturbing... [the policy appears to be] if one person is a second choice, they have less experience and less distinction and is a woman, [the woman] should have the job."

In her own right, Armstrong commented that affirmative action does not ensure jobs to second-bests. "Affirmative action is certainly one of the components that goes into the decision to hire someone. It is not the sole component, and if someone isn't qualified affirmative action doesn't enter into it," she said. She also refuted the comments Dudley allegedly made, saying he could have misunderstood her request, although she made it in

writing. Dudley did not return phone calls.

Armstrong's version of the story begins with a routine request she made after the board recommended Vorwerk. "In reviewing the recruitment record for the search I found that the second candidate's [Paiment's] qualifications did not seem congruent with that on the resume." She requested a letter from the board with more explanation. "All they needed to say was that her resume was overstated... or something like that," she said.

Armstrong added that if board members felt that they had not considered Paiment's qualifications accurately, they had every right to reconsider the case. "Whether they were willing to consider promise of distinction... is the board's judgement."

Since neither Dudley nor Geoff Pollum, acting director of the arts, was available for comment, it's unclear if the incident was the result of miscommunication—in which case a reconsideration may be in order. Also unclear is if the affirmative action challenge was a guise under which administrators reconsidered Vorwerk. Second-hand sources have, however, attributed statements to administrators that more "facts" were involved in the case than met the eye, a notion Vorwerk rejected. "The inference is that there's some skeleton in the closet, which is very destructive and disturbing, because there isn't anything."