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Wellesley College to give award to professor fired from university in China allegedly for advocating for democracy, freedom

Posted by Matt Rocheleau December 16, 2013 02:55 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

Wellesley College will give a new award to a professor from China who made headlines recently when he was recently fired by a partner university in the communist country, allegedly because he spoke out in favor of democracy and individual freedom.

Professor David Xia Yeliang will receive the inaugural Award for Civil Courage from the college's Freedom Project, which aims to study the concept of freedom in different societies, said a statement from Wellesley president H. Kim Bottomly.

Xia will receive the honor "in recognition of exceptional courage in fostering the ideals of human rights, freedom, and the rule of law," the statement said.

He is scheduled to receive the award next fall when he visits the campus for a public lecture.

Bottomly wrote that the college offered to hire Xia to work for the Freedom Project, but said he has instead accepted a full-time, permanent appointment at "a major US research institute," which did not name.

While Xia will not be an employee at Wellesley College, he will hold the title of "visiting associate" at the Freedom Project, campus officials said.

And, Bottomly said Xia plans to visit Wellesley's campus occasionally "to share his experiences as a human rights activist in China."

"In faculty seminars, lectures, and Freedom Project conferences and events, he will discuss his efforts to expand freedom and democracy in China," Bottomly said.

Xia was fired in October by Peking University, where he had taught for the past 13 years.

Xia and some Wellesley faculty who support him have said he was fired because of his political views. The Chinese university has said he was fired because he was not a good teacher.

The university had notified Xia in June that he may be fired. That announcement prompted more than 130 faculty at Wellesley College to sign a petition saying leaders

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of their institution should "reconsider" a newly-formed partnership with Peking University if the university fired Xia.

However, shortly after Xia's firing, Wellesley faculty voted that the college should continue its partnership with Peking University.

Yet, the faculty said they wanted to examine more closely the Wellesley-Peking relationship, which includes faculty and student exchanges, joint research, virtual collaborations and other ties.

"Wellesley's faculty has also committed to shaping the future of our partnership with Peking University," said a statement in early November from Wellesley College president H. Kim Bottomly. "A faculty committee will develop Wellesley's recommendations for the parameters and elements of the partnership. These recommendations will be brought to the full faculty body at Wellesley for approval and will then be shared with faculty counterparts at Peking University for their consideration."

This story was updated on Dec. 19 to include an announcement from Wellesley College that Xia will hold the title of visiting associate at the Freedom Project.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus](#) pages.

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