

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

April Brown v. Arizona Board of Regents

Brown · No. CV-24-08078-PCT-KML · Decided February 26, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Arizona granted the Arizona Board of Regents’ motion for summary judgment in April Brown’s Title VII sex-discrimination claim arising from the nonrenewal of her non-tenure-track faculty contract at Northern Arizona University. The court assumed Brown established a prima facie case based on male comparators but concluded she lacked sufficient evidence that the stated nondiscriminatory rationale was pretextual. The court also applied the same-actor inference because the primary decision-maker had recently supported Brown’s promotion.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Arizona
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Krissa M. Lanham
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Arizona
DECIDED	February 26, 2026
DOCKET	CV-24-08078-PCT-KML
DISPOSITION	other
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendant moved for summary judgment on plaintiff's remaining Title VII sex-discrimination claim after the parties stipulated to dismissal of the retaliation claim.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Summary judgment is proper when there is no genuine dispute as to any material fact and the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Viewing the evidence in the light most favorable to the nonmovant, the court asks whether a reasonable jury could find by a preponderance of the evidence that the challenged employment action was taken because of sex.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	nonprecedential district court order

TOPICS

- employment discrimination
- title vii
- summary judgment
- civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

employment law

civil rights

civil procedure

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Brown presented sufficient evidence to establish a prima facie case of disparate-treatment sex discrimination under Title VII.
2. Whether ABOR offered a legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason for Brown's contract nonrenewal and whether Brown presented sufficient evidence of pretext to avoid summary judgment.
3. Whether the same-actor inference applied because Pugliesi advocated for Brown's promotion shortly before selecting her for nonrenewal.

HOLDINGS

1. Brown established, or at minimum the court assumed she established, a prima facie case because she was a member of a protected class, qualified for and satisfactorily performed her job, suffered the adverse employment action of contract nonrenewal, and identified substantially equal male comparators whose contracts were renewed.
2. ABOR articulated a legitimate, nondiscriminatory reason for nonrenewing Brown's contract, and Brown failed to produce direct or specific and substantial circumstantial evidence from which a reasonable jury could find that the stated rationale was pretextual.
3. The same-actor inference applied because Pugliesi advocated for and formally recommended Brown's promotion shortly before selecting Brown for nonrenewal, requiring an extraordinarily strong showing of discrimination to establish pretext.

KEY QUOTATIONS

"Where the same actor responsible for the adverse employment action was shortly beforehand responsible for a positive employment action, the court infers there was no discrimination." (at 9)

"Brown made a prima facie case of discrimination but did not provide sufficient evidence to overcome ABOR's nondiscriminatory rationale for her non-renewal, particularly given the applicability of the same-actor inference." (at 10)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Brown worked as a non-tenure-track faculty member at Northern Arizona University from 2016 until her yearly contract was not renewed for the 2020-2021 academic year. She had positive performance reviews, received teaching recognition, and was promoted through a multilevel process in February 2020. During COVID-related staffing reductions, ABOR selected Brown for nonrenewal based on asserted instructional, enrollment, strategic-impact, and programmatic considerations; Brown identified two male journalism faculty members whose contracts were renewed as comparators. Karen Pugliesi, who had advocated for Brown's promotion shortly before the nonrenewal decision, was the primary decision-maker in selecting Brown for nonrenewal.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

April Brown sued the Arizona Board of Regents, alleging that the nonrenewal of her yearly faculty contract at Northern Arizona University was motivated by sex discrimination and retaliation under Title VII. The parties stipulated to dismissal of the retaliation claim. The court granted ABOR's motion for summary judgment on the remaining gender-discrimination claim and directed the Clerk to enter judgment for defendant and close the case.

DISPOSITION

other

CASES CITED

- Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317, 322-23 (1986)
- Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc., 477 U.S. 242, 248-49, 255 (1986)
- First National Bank of Arizona v. Cities Service Co., 391 U.S. 253, 289 (1968)
- Cornwell v. Electra Central Credit Union, 439 F.3d 1018, 1028 (9th Cir. 2006)
- Freyd v. University of Oregon, 990 F.3d 1211, 1220, 1228-29 (9th Cir. 2021)
- McDonnell Douglas Corp. v. Green, 411 U.S. 792, 802-04 (1973)
- Gleason v. Filter Holdings, LLC, 737 F. Supp. 3d 1033, 1066 (D. Or. 2024)
- Lui v. DeJoy, 129 F.4th 770, 777 (9th Cir. 2025)
- White v. AKDHC, LLC, 664 F. Supp. 2d 1054, 1067-68 (D. Ariz. 2009)
- Reynaga v. Roseburg Forest Products, 847 F.3d 678, 691 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Beck v. United Food & Commercial Workers Union, Local 99, 506 F.3d 874, 885 n.5 (9th Cir. 2007)
- Vasquez v. County of Los Angeles, 349 F.3d 634, 641 (9th Cir. 2003)
- Coghlan v. American Seafoods Co. LLC, 413 F.3d 1090, 1094-98 (9th Cir. 2005)
- Blair v. Shulkin, 685 F. App'x 587, 588 (9th Cir. 2017)
- Bostock v. Clayton County, 590 U.S. 644, 665 (2020)
- Chuang v. University of California Davis, Board of Trustees, 225 F.3d 1115, 1124 (9th Cir. 2000)
- Weil v. Citizens Telecom Services Co., 922 F.3d 993, 1002 (9th Cir. 2019)
- Diaz v. Eagle Produce Ltd. Partnership, 521 F.3d 1201, 1214 (9th Cir. 2008)
- Bradley v. Harcourt, Brace & Co., 104 F.3d 267, 270-71 (9th Cir. 1997)
- Crudder v. Peoria Unified School District No. 11, No. 2:09-CV-0435-HRH, 2010 WL 11523855, at *5 (D. Ariz. Dec. 21, 2010), aff'd, 468 F. App'x 781 (9th Cir. 2012)
- Bois v. Levi Strauss & Co., No. 23-CV-02772-TLT, 2024 WL 4004980, at *11 (N.D. Cal. July 30, 2024)
- Curry v. Contra Costa County, No. 12-CV-03940-WHO, 2014 WL 1724431, at *11 (N.D. Cal. Apr. 30, 2014)