

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



December 2, 2014

Dear Dr. Killeen,

As executive officers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we would like to congratulate you on your new position. We look forward to working with you to keep the University of Illinois at the forefront of public research institutions of higher learning. We also recognize, however, that you will be taking the helm of the university at an especially difficult and crucial point in its history. We would therefore like to take this opportunity to address the particular challenges presented by recent events on our own campus and steps that you might take to help in healing divisions and moving both UIUC and the entire university system forward.

The recent words and actions of senior officials in connection with the decision to revoke an offer of a tenured position in American Indian Studies to Dr. Steven Salaita have done genuine damage to the university, and especially to the Urbana-Champaign campus, that remains largely unrecognized outside of the affected units. The program in American Indian Studies has itself obviously suffered the most as the result of the administration's actions, but the harm to other units is also significant and ongoing. Representatives of the American Anthropological Association, the American Comparative Literature Association, the American Historical Association, the American Philosophical Association, the American Sociological Association, the American Studies Association, and the Modern Languages Association, among others, have issued strongly worded statements or letters critical of the university. More than 5,000 academics from across the country and around the world have expressed their disapproval by boycotting UIUC. More than three-dozen scheduled talks and multiple conferences across a variety of disciplines – including, for example, this year's entire colloquium series in the Department of Philosophy – have already been canceled, and more continue to be canceled, as outside speakers have withdrawn in response to the university's handling of Dr. Salaita's case. The Department of English decided to postpone a program review originally scheduled for spring 2015 in anticipation of being unable to find qualified external examiners willing to come to campus. Tenure and promotion cases may be affected as faculty at peer institutions consider extending the boycott to recommendation letters.

Most troubling of all, the ability of many departments to successfully conduct faculty searches, especially at the senior level, has been seriously jeopardized. While the possible negative effects on even junior searches remain to be seen, the Department of History has already abandoned a previously authorized senior search in U.S. history this year in recognition of the bleak prospects of attracting suitable applicants in the current climate. An open rank search in Philosophy attracted 80% fewer applicants at the rank of associate or full professor than a senior search in the same area of specialization just last year. We have long been proud of the University of Illinois' ability to maintain and extend its excellence through the recruitment of the very best scholars in the world. In many disciplines, however, we cannot hope to recruit excellent senior faculty to this campus, or to retain many of those already here, when they can no longer trust that this university will honor the principles of faculty decision-making, free speech, and freedom to conduct research.

To date, the fallout from the Salaita decision has been felt most acutely in programs throughout the humanities and social sciences, but even more widespread consequences for UIUC may also be on the horizon. In advance of the final decision by the Board of Trustees not to approve Dr. Salaita's appointment, the Associate Secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Dr. Anita Levy, sent a letter on behalf of that organization to Chancellor Wise. The letter warned that "[a]borting an appointment in this manner without having demonstrated cause has consistently been seen by the AAUP as tantamount to summary dismissal, an action categorically inimical to academic freedom and due process." An independent investigation of the Salaita case by the AAUP and a recommendation by its Committee A on Academic Freedom to place UIUC on the "Censure List" of institutions where "unsatisfactory conditions of academic freedom and tenure have been found to prevail" seems increasingly likely. The harmful effects of a formal censure by the AAUP, a rebuke with very few precedents for an institution of our size and stature, would be felt far more widely across the entire campus than any of the current boycotts or the criticisms already registered by other professional associations and individuals. As the next president of the University of Illinois, it is imperative that you do everything possible to ensure UIUC's reputation and good standing among major research universities.

The concerns raised by the university's handling of Dr. Salaita's case fall into two broad categories: (1) concerns about academic freedom and free speech generally, and (2) concerns about shared governance and well-established protocols for hiring, promotion, and tenure.

The first set of concerns extends well beyond possible infringements on Dr. Salaita's own freedom of expression or academic freedom. In attempting to provide justification for the decision to revoke the job offer to Dr. Salaita, Chancellor Wise and the Board of Trustees, joined by President Easter, among other university officials, issued statements on academic freedom that were both expansive and troubling. Chancellor Wise's statement, originally sent as a massmail to the university community, included the following paragraph:

What we cannot and will not tolerate at the University of Illinois are personal and disrespectful words or actions that demean and abuse either viewpoints themselves or those who express them. We have a particular duty to our students to ensure that they live in a community of scholarship that challenges their assumptions about the world but that also respects their rights as individuals.

The Board of Trustees and President Easter went even further in their own massmail, which followed immediately upon that of Chancellor Wise. In it, they wrote:

The University of Illinois must shape men and women who will contribute as citizens in a diverse and multicultural democracy. To succeed in this mission, we must constantly reinforce our expectation of a university community that values civility as much as scholarship. Disrespectful and demeaning speech that promotes malice is not an acceptable form of civil argument . . . There can be no place for that in our democracy, and therefore, there will be no place for it in our university.

On their face, such sweeping claims are directly at odds with the AAUP's own declarations on academic freedom, to which the University of Illinois professes to subscribe. The statements in these massmails from senior university leaders make no distinction between the context of Dr. Salaita's termination and university policy toward prospective hires or current employees. Nor

do these statements distinguish between extramural and professional contexts. Unqualified proclamations to the effect that “we will not tolerate ... disrespectful words or actions that demean and abuse either viewpoints themselves [*sic*] or those who express them” or that “there will be no place ... in our university” for allegedly objectionable speech raise the chilling prospect of new restrictions on the free expression of all university employees in the name of “civility.”

We certainly agree that university employees should, to paraphrase the AAUP’s “1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure,” remember their special obligations to be accurate, to exercise appropriate restraint, to show respect for others’ opinions, and to make it clear that they speak as individuals and not for either their institution or their profession at large. When members of the university community fail to fulfill these obligations, it is entirely appropriate for administrators to attempt to distance the institution from any offending statements and to reemphasize the values of tolerance, inclusion, and civility. But university employees must ultimately remain free from the threat of either institutional censorship or discipline for the exercise of free speech.

Beyond raising serious concerns about academic freedom and free speech, the decision to revoke Dr. Salaita’s offer of employment clearly violated fundamental principles of shared governance and long-established protocols at UIUC related to hiring, promotion, and tenure. An offer of a tenured appointment at the university comes only at the end of a long and thorough process. It involves soliciting external letters of evaluation from recognized experts in the relevant field and reviews at multiple levels by committees constituted for precisely this purpose. After being identified as the best candidate in a national search, Dr. Salaita’s tenure file was reviewed and approved first by a committee from his proposed home unit, American Indian Studies, and subsequently by separate committees at the level of both the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) and the entire UIUC campus. The latter committee in Dr. Salaita’s own case notably included the chair of the campus committee on promotion and tenure, the dean of the graduate college, the provost, the vice chancellor for research, and even Chancellor Wise herself. At every level of review, the appointment met with approval.

In stark contrast to this rigorous process of academic review, the initial decision not to forward Dr. Salaita’s appointment to the Board of Trustees was taken without consulting relevant faculty and academic officials in the university regarding the merits of the case. Respect for the expertise and judgment of academic officials, and especially of relevant disciplinary faculty, in assessing the qualifications of candidates for academic positions or promotions is a pillar of shared governance. And yet not a single faculty member in American Indian Studies or official in the LAS Dean’s Office was made aware of the decision to revoke the offer to Dr. Salaita, or even that such an option was under consideration, until after Chancellor Wise had sent him a letter on August 1 announcing it. Despite repeated expressions of regret at her acknowledged lack of proper consultation, Chancellor Wise also made no effort to correct this serious failure at any time prior to the September 11 meeting of the Board of Trustees, at which both she and President Easter urged the Board to formally reject Dr. Salaita’s appointment.

We the undersigned executive officers believe deeply in the mission of the University of Illinois and in the integrity of its faculty. As scholars and as leaders, we also believe in the principles of free academic speech, and in a shared process of academic decision-making. We ask you as the next president of this university to demonstrate your own belief in these same ideals by explicitly and emphatically reaffirming the university’s commitment to an understanding of academic

freedom and free speech that accords with AAUP policy statements on the subject, and to fundamental principles of shared governance, including the need for academic appointments to be made in consultation with relevant academic officials and on the basis of academic qualifications. Such actions on your part would help send a strong message to our concerned colleagues across the nation and around the world that the University of Illinois remains committed to the values that help define a distinguished institution of higher learning.

Sincerely,

Matthew Ando, Chair, Department of Mathematics  
Ronald Bailey, Head, Department of African American Studies  
Thomas Bassett, Director, LAS Global Studies  
Merle Bowen, Director, Center for African Studies  
Matti Bunzl, Director, Program in Jewish Culture and Society  
Antoinette Burton, Interim Head, Department of Sociology  
David Cooper, Director, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center  
Jane Desmond, Director, International Forum for US Studies  
Stephanie Foote, Chair, Department of Gender & Women's Studies  
Gregory Girolami, Head, Department of Chemistry  
Dara Goldman, Director, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies  
Dianne Harris Director, Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities  
Valerie Hoffman, Director, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies  
Jonathan Inda, Chair, Department of Latina/Latino Studies  
Jeffrey Eric Jenkins, Head, Department of Theatre  
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Diane Koenker, Chair, Department of History  
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