

April 4, 2024

President Jay Hartzell  
Office of the President  
University of Texas at Austin

Dear President Hartzell:

We, the Executive Committee of the UT Austin advocacy chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), join the Texas Legislative Black Caucus in calling on you to cancel the termination notices sent to some sixty UT Austin professional staff who were previously employed in DEI roles and are now employed in other non-DEI capacities.

As a professional organization dedicated to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, shared governance, and due process, our AAUP chapter has serious and urgent concerns about your action on all three counts that fall within our purview.

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression. Terminating staff for their previous lawful association with DEI initiatives is discriminatory and infringes on their freedom of expression. These employees all pivoted to non-DEI activities on January 1 at your direction, so the terminations are not based on their job performance or behavior since that date but rather, their involvement in the very DEI activities that they were previously hired to lawfully carry out. Your letter justifies the terminations on the basis of redundancy and inefficiency but gives no evidence of these within the Division of Campus and Community Engagement. This unit is the result of years of hard work to coordinate engagement efforts on and off campus, and distributing its activities among nine units hardly seems efficient. If you have concerns about the division's efficiency, or about the University's compliance with SB 17, surely you can find remedies that do not violate your previous assurances that no staff member would lose their job at UT Austin due to SB 17. Staff members and faculty built their lives around those assurances, and these terminations threaten the trust on which the University community is based.

Shared Governance and Transparency. Your decision to eliminate the Division of Campus and Community Engagement (DCCE) was undertaken without consultation with key stakeholders, including the Faculty Council. We have inquired, and the Faculty Council Executive Committee was not consulted about this decision, and will only be meeting with you next week, after the decision was publicly announced. As you know, many programs housed in DCCE engage with the University's academic programs. Principles of shared governance require that decisions affecting academic programs involve notification and consultation with the Faculty Council.

We are disappointed that the communication about the terminations has lacked transparency and was released in a way that blindsided the entire community, including faculty leadership. Although clearly not the intention, such actions can lead to a loss of trust and a perception of dishonesty. This has been reinforced by the press reporting that their queries are going

unanswered, something doubly important because most of the university community has been learning about events as they have unfolded through the media and not from your office.

Finally, in the absence of any information from your administration about the number of professional staff and faculty involved, nor how many of them are members of underrepresented minority groups, we have concerns that these terminations will have a disparate impact on certain populations, possibly in violation of federal law and surely to the detriment of the University's reputation.

Due Process. Faculty and staff at the University expect due process when the administration makes decisions that affect our livelihood and work conditions. Your termination notice completely violates these expectations of due process. Staff who have been terminated deserve to be told why they are being terminated, and they deserve a grievance process.

Given these serious violations of what faculty and staff expect of University leadership, we call on you to restore our confidence in your administration by doing the following:

1. Rescind the termination notices of all staff who received them on April 2, 2024.
2. Restore the Division of Campus and Community Engagement and discontinue the reorganization of its programs.
3. Work with staff members in good faith to address any compliance issues that remain with respect to SB 17.
4. Explicitly reaffirm your commitment to academic freedom, shared governance, due process, and transparent communication
5. Explicitly reaffirm that SB 17 does not affect academic programming and research, and that the University will work to ensure that all students are supported in every way that complies with SB 17.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We have made this letter public, and we look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

Pauline Turner Strong, Provost's Distinguished Service Professor, Professor of Anthropology, and Faculty Affiliate in Women's and Gender Studies, Native American and Indigenous Studies, and Human Dimensions of Organization; President, UT Austin AAUP

Andrea C. Gore, Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology, Vacek Chair in Pharmacology, Revco Foundation Fellow in Pharmacy; Vice President, UT Austin AAUP

Lauren Jae Gutterman, Associate Professor, Departments of American Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; UT Austin AAUP Secretary

Steven Seegel; Professor of Slavic and Eurasian Studies; UT Austin AAUP Treasurer

Brian L. Evans, Engineering Foundation Professor, Chandra Family Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering; Past President, UT Austin AAUP

Karma R. Chávez, Chair and Bobby and Sherri Patton Professor, Department of Mexican American and Latina/o Studies; UT Austin AAUP Member at Large

Julia Mickenberg, Professor of American Studies and Faculty Affiliate, Women's and Gender Studies, Jewish Studies, and Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies; UT Austin AAUP Member At Large

Cc:

Sharon L. Wood, Executive Vice President and Provost

Amanda Cochran-McCall, Vice President for Legal Affairs and General Council

Richard Flores, Deputy to the President for Academic Strategies

Claudia F. Lucchinetti, M.D., Dean and Senior Vice President for Medical Affairs

LaToya Smith, Vice President for Campus and Community Engagement

Roger T. Bonnecaze, Dean, Cockrell School of Engineering

Charles Martinez, Dean, School of Education

Ramón Rivera-Servera, Dean, College of Fine Arts

Ann Huff Stevens, Dean, College of Liberal Arts

David Vandembout, Dean, College of Natural Sciences

Samuel Poloyac, Dean, College of Pharmacy

Sarah Ades, Dean of the Graduate School and Senior Vice Provost for Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Claudia Mora, Dean Jackson School of Geosciences

JR DeShazo, Dean, LBJ School of Public Affairs

Lillian Mills, McCombs School of Business

Rachel Davis Mersey, Dean, Moody College of Communication

Heather Woofter, Dean, School of Architecture

Justin Dyer, Dean, School of Civic Leadership

Eric T. Meyer, Dean, School of Information

Robert M. Chesney, Dean, School of Law

Eun-ok Im, Dean, School of Nursing

Allan Cole, Dean, Steve Hicks School of Social Work

Richard J. Reddick, Dean of the Undergraduate College and Senior Vice Provost for Curriculum and Enrollment

Jen Moon, Chair, Faculty Council

Charlotte Canning, Stella Flores, Domino Perez, Faculty Council officers