

**APPROVED BY SENATE**  
**03/09/2015**

**RS.15.07**  
February 9, 2015

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS**  
**URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE**  
Prefiled Resolution

**RS.15.07      Concerns about Shared Governance and Academic Freedom**

The Academic Senate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign expresses very serious concerns about significant violations of the principles and best practices of shared governance in the decision to reject the recommendation to appoint Dr. Salaita to a tenured position in American Indian Studies. The Senate is equally concerned about the potential for threats to academic freedom created by some of the public statements from Chancellor Wise, President Easter, and the Board of Trustees, as set out in the "Report on the Investigation into the Matter of Steven Salaita" prepared by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure (CAFT). Finally, the Senate is concerned about damage done to our campus by external responses to this decision, including statements of condemnation from various professional societies, boycotts by numerous scholars, and possible censure by the American Association of University Professors.

In expressing these concerns, the Senate takes no position on the merits of any legal claims made by Dr. Salaita in his recently filed lawsuit against various administrators of and donors to the university. The concerns expressed herein regarding shared governance and academic freedom as they relate to administrators and current faculty are entirely independent of any questions regarding the legal authority for, or permissibility of, the actions taken by the Chancellor, President, or Board of Trustees in Dr. Salaita's case.

The initial recommendation to appoint Dr. Salaita was thoroughly reviewed and approved by his proposed home unit, the college-level promotion and tenure committee, and a campus committee that included the chair of the campus committee on promotion and tenure, the dean of the graduate college, the vice chancellor for research, the Provost, and the Chancellor.

Then, in July 2014, the Chancellor became informed about a series of controversial comments on Twitter by Dr. Salaita (reproduced in part in the CAFT report), many posted after these original recommendations were made. At a subsequent meeting with the Board of Trustees, the Chancellor came to believe that the President and the Board would not approve the proposed hire that she had previously approved. In her Aug. 1, 2014 letter to Dr. Salaita she informed him of her decision not to forward the recommendation to the Board of Trustees. According to the CAFT report and the Chancellor's public statements, this decision was taken without consulting any authorized faculty review committees, the relevant academic officials in American Indian Studies, the Office of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS), or the Provost. This lack of consultation was inconsistent with both Illinois' tradition of shared governance and the longstanding guidelines of the American Association of University Professors.

As the AAUP "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities" clarifies, the primary responsibility for appointments, the granting of tenure, and dismissal lies with the university's faculty, and administrators should act in opposition to faculty recommendations in these and other areas of its purview only "in rare instances and for compelling reasons which should be stated in detail" (<http://www.aaup.org/report/statement-government-colleges-and-universities>). The Senate reaffirms its commitment to these central principles of shared governance as they relate to faculty hiring practices at the University of Illinois.

Without discussing the reasons for her decision with the LAS dean or the director of AIS, the Chancellor issued a public statement on Aug. 22, 2014, asserting that her rejection of the recommendation to hire Dr. Salaita was based upon concerns, raised by his controversial Twitter comments, that students holding opposing views might not feel free to express those views or might not be treated respectfully in his classroom (Mass email to campus, Aug. 22, 2014, reproduced in <http://illinois.edu/blog/view/1109/115906>).

In justifying that view, Chancellor Wise made the following statement:

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, joined by President Easter and other university officials, echoed the Chancellor's rationale in a subsequent massmail sent on the same date. Like the Chancellor, they invoked norms of civility in explaining their reasons for not accepting the hiring recommendation:

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.

(<https://www.uillinois.edu/cms/One.aspx?portalId=1324&pageId=136970>)

The Chancellor has asserted that she never intended her statement on civility to be interpreted as policy. However, because such sweeping claims do not distinguish between prospective hires and current employees, or between extramural and professional contexts, they are at odds with the AAUP's statement that when University professors "speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline" (1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure; <http://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>).

The Academic Senate therefore rejects as unacceptably broad the claim that the University of Illinois "cannot and will not tolerate ... disrespectful words or actions that demean or abuse either viewpoints themselves or those who express them" and the notion that the university should value "civility as much as scholarship." The Senate believes that these statements should be corrected or clarified to reassure faculty that a lack of civility itself is not a basis for a decision to discipline or dismiss a faculty member.

Respectfully Submitted,

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