



October 12, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND USPS

Dr. M. Brian Blake  
Provost  
Drexel University  
3141 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104

Dear Provost Blake:

Dr. George Ciccariello-Maher, an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and Global Studies, has sought the advice and assistance of the American Association of University Professors as a result of your October 9, 2017, letter informing him that he was being placed on paid administrative leave, effective immediately. Your letter states, "The Drexel Police Department, after consultation with other law enforcement agencies, has determined that your presence on campus poses a significant public safety risk to the Drexel University community" and refers to "a number of death threats and threats of violence" against Professor Ciccariello-Maher and his family. These threats followed Professor Ciccariello-Maher's recent postings on the social media site Twitter about the shooting in Las Vegas. Your letter adds that the "situation has heightened concerns for the safety of not only you and your family, but for our students, your faculty colleagues, professional staff and others who are part of the University community." Despite the stated safety concerns, Professor Ciccariello-Maher has informed us that he did not agree to be placed on leave.

This is not the first time that we have communicated with you with respect to Professor Ciccariello-Maher. On April 12, at your invitation, I conferred by telephone with you and Professor Ludo Scheffer, chair of the faculty senate, regarding his situation at that time and provided both of you with information regarding the principles of academic freedom and due process promulgated by this Association, as set forth in the *Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings* and the *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure* (both enclosed). On May 18, I wrote to you to convey the Association's concern over the formation of a committee of inquiry out-

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side the faculty governance structure to investigate Professor Ciccariello-Maher's extramural speech. In that letter I provided additional information about Association-supported principles of academic freedom as they relate to the freedom of extramural utterances.

As our enclosed report on the *Use and Abuse of Faculty Suspensions* notes, the AAUP regards an action to separate a faculty member from ongoing academic responsibilities, whether with pay or without, to be a suspension. It further regards suspensions to be severely adverse personnel actions both because of what they imply about the faculty member's professional fitness and because of the potential effect on the faculty member's reputation. Under AAUP-recommended standards, a faculty member can be suspended for only two reasons: (1) to sanction serious misconduct and (2) to protect the faculty member or others from "immediate harm" during the process leading to dismissal or the imposition of another severe sanction. When an administration wishes to impose a suspension as a stand-alone sanction for serious misconduct, it must first demonstrate adequacy of cause for doing so in an adjudicative hearing before an elected faculty body (Regulation 7a). When an administration is taking steps that may lead to a faculty member's dismissal, which can only be effected after the same sort of faculty hearing just described, it may suspend the faculty member "only if immediate harm to the faculty member or others is threatened by continuance." Prior to imposing a suspension under these circumstances, the administration must consult with a duly constituted faculty committee "concerning the propriety, the length, and the other conditions of the suspension" (Regulation 5c[1] of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*).

Although we appreciate that the stated reason for the action to suspend Professor Ciccariello-Maher is a perceived threat of immediate harm, the administration apparently did not consult with a duly constituted faculty committee prior to imposing the suspension. Further, an e-mail message from you to Professor Ciccariello-Maher that accompanies your October 9 letter states that you "hope to have concrete plans by the following week to minimize any disruption" to Professor Ciccariello-Maher's students, implying that his suspension may extend indefinitely. Indeed, you have yet to provide a firm end date for it. Under AAUP-recommended procedural standards, "a suspension which is not followed by either reinstatement or the opportunity for a hearing is a summary dismissal in violation of academic due process" (Interpretive Comment No. 9 on the 1940 *Statement*).

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In his October 10 *Washington Post* op-ed, Professor Ciccariello-Maher wrote that, by suspending him, the Drexel administration “bow[ed] to pressure from racist internet trolls” and “sent the wrong signal,” namely, that “you can control a university’s curriculum with anonymous threats of violence.” He further suggested that the suspension threatened his academic freedom and tenured status. We share these concerns, which remain unaddressed absent consultation with an appropriate faculty body, as required under Regulation 5c(1).

We appreciate that you may have additional information that might contribute to our understanding of what has occurred. We shall therefore welcome your comments. If the facts as we have recounted them are essentially accurate, we urge the administration to consult as soon as possible with an elected faculty body concerning the propriety, the length, and the other conditions of the suspension so as to ensure that it is not extended beyond any threat of immediate harm. We further urge the administration to inform Ciccariello-Maher in writing of the outcome of this determination.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Hans-Joerg Tiede, PhD

Associate Secretary

Enclosures by electronic mail

cc: Mr. John A. Fry, President  
Dr. Donna Murasko, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences  
Professor Ludo Scheffer, Chair, Faculty Senate  
Professor John Hinshaw, President, Pennsylvania State Division of the AAUP  
Professor George Ciccariello-Maher