



January 12, 2016

Dear Chairman Cupps and Members of the University of Missouri Board of Curators:

Recent news stories suggest that Professor Melissa Click has been or will soon be recommended for tenure in the University of Missouri Communications Department. Professor Click, as you know, came to America's attention as she screamed for "muscle" to prevent enterprising and courageous student journalists on your campus from covering protests on racism.

In [a recent letter](#), faculty have defended the professor who accosted these journalists. "We wish to state in no uncertain terms our support for Click as a member of the University of Missouri faculty who has earned her position through an outstanding record of teaching and research," the professors' letter reads. In the words of these colleagues, Professor Click's behavior on video was "at most a regrettable mistake."

Faced with Professor Click's behavior, we understand from [local](#) and [national](#) media, that state lawmakers have demanded that the University fire Professor Click, as well as Janna Basler, the campus's assistant director of Greek life, who participated in the rough handling of the student journalists.

As Curators, you are legally responsible for the academic and economic health of your institution. You are also ultimately responsible for modeling adherence to key principles of high academic standards, academic freedom, and free speech on campus. The tenure process rests largely in the hands of academic departments, but you, the Curators, are ultimately responsible for the integrity and appropriateness of all tenure decisions.

Professor Click deserves due process. But students, faculty, and taxpayers also deserve assurance that the tenure process at Missouri is both thorough and fair. Universities have an obligation to ensure that faculty members are living up to the ethical compact that academic freedom represents.

There is nothing more crucial for a quality education than a culture of openness and free speech. Surely, that means professors must model professional behavior and a clear understanding of their field. The Missouri Communications Department itself stated that it "supports the First Amendment as a fundamental right and guiding principle underlying all that we do as an academic community. Intimidation is never an acceptable form of communication." Indeed, understanding of the First Amendment and adherence to it are prerequisites for any faculty member seeking what is virtually lifetime job protection and a multi-million-dollar commitment from the institution.

Given Professor Click's recent behavior, new and relevant questions must be raised as to whether she can meet the professional standards that undergird the granting of tenure. The University's own Collected Rules and Regulations state that "the professor has a

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particular obligation for promoting conditions of free inquiry and to further public understanding of academic freedom” (300.C.2.d). Academic freedom does not mean the right to assault students verbally or physically, or to encourage mobs to do the same. The fact that Professor Click felt the need to resign her courtesy appointment to the journalism school following the incident on the campus, at a minimum, mandates a reopening of the process to determine any new and additional facts.

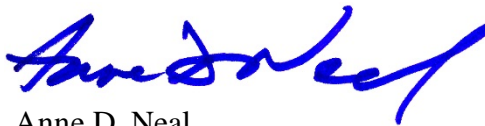
In the interest of due process and of accountability to the people of Missouri, we call on the Board to insist that Professor Click’s recent behavior on campus be given full and rigorous review and be made a part of her tenure portfolio.

Professor Click’s case, however, should not be the end of the matter.

Given the recent widespread public attention to the University, the Board has an opportunity to show leadership by articulating the University’s absolute commitment to freedom of inquiry, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech. The University would do well to reiterate these principles at convocations, during freshman orientations, and in course catalogs and syllabi. In doing so, the University of Missouri will align itself with the best practices of academic life. The American Council on Education has stated, “Intellectual pluralism and academic freedom are central principles of American higher education.” The American Association of University Professors has called on the professoriate to honor their obligations toward students: “Professors demonstrate respect for students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors,” and “professors show due respect for the opinions of others.”

In asserting these values and in applying them in their review of Professor Click’s campus behavior, the Curators will uphold the trust that the citizens of the State of Missouri have placed in them.

Warm regards,



Anne D. Neal
President

cc: The Honorable David Pearce, Chairman, Senate Education Committee
The Honorable Brian Nieves, Vice-Chairman, Senate Education Committee
The Honorable Steve Cookson, Chairman, House Committee on Higher Education
The Honorable Dean Dohrman, Vice-Chairman, House Committee on Higher Education