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April 27, 2016

Dear Regent:

The University of Texas is to be congratulated for dismissing the claims of harassment lodged by students against Professor Ami Pedahzur. In announcing the dismissal, President Fenves admirably invoked the Chicago Statement on Principles of Free Expression to underscore the critical role universities must play in fostering the free exchange of ideas: "As the University of Chicago states in its 'Principles of Free Expression,' a university 'has a solemn responsibility not only to promote a lively and fearless freedom of debate and deliberation, but also to protect that freedom when others attempt to restrict it.'"

In the wake of recent events, we urge you now, as we did in our earlier letter, formally to adopt the principles of the University of Chicago's 2014 Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression (enclosed), which Princeton, Winston-Salem, Purdue, and Chapman have already done. Johns Hopkins, American University, and the University of Wisconsin System have adopted similar policies affirming the value of free speech. Among the Chicago principles is the following:

The University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. . . . Indeed, fostering the ability of members of the University community to engage in such debate and deliberation in an effective and responsible manner is an essential part of the University's educational mission.

In tandem, we urge you, going forward, to ensure that UT vigorously enforces existing policies imposing sanctions for disruptions that violate UT's community values. Institutional Rules on Student Services and

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Activities at UT–Austin define “Disruption” of authorized campus activities as a disciplinary offense. While recognizing that “interference and disruption are unavoidably contextual,” Section 13-301 of the *Institutional Rules* states that “intentional physical interference with other persons is nearly always disruptive in any context,” as can be “persistent heckling that prevents listeners from hearing the speaker.”

Universities understandably struggle with enforcement of their rules against disruption and the “heckler’s veto.” However, sanctions must be imposed appropriately if they are to work as a deterrent to subsequent disruption.

In taking such a stand for free expression and the rule of law, you, as fiduciaries, will establish UT as a leader among colleges in promoting free and open inquiry. We look forward to hearing how you will proceed.

Thank you for your service to American higher education.

Warm regards,



Anne D. Neal
President

Enclosure