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**Subject:** FW: Request for retraction and correction

**Date:** Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 4:25:08 PM Central Daylight Time

**From:** Lora Burnett

**To:** Raj Menon

Dear Mr. Menon,

I inadvertently left you off of the email below. My sincerest apologies.

Dr. Lora Burnett  
Professor of History  
Collin College

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**From:** Lora Burnett [REDACTED]  
**Date:** Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at 4:23 PM  
**To:** Bob Collins [REDACTED], Jim Orr [REDACTED], Stacy Arias [REDACTED],  
Andy Hardin [REDACTED], Stacey Donald [REDACTED], Greg Gomel [REDACTED],  
[REDACTED], Fred Moses [REDACTED], Jay Saad [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** Neil Matkin [REDACTED], Toni Jenkins [REDACTED], Floyd Nickerson [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Request for retraction and correction

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

I am writing to respectfully request that the public statement posted on the Collin College website on October 12, 2020 be removed or its link disabled. I request that a shorter, more appropriate statement be posted as a news release at the Collin College website, along these lines: "Collin College affirms the right of all its faculty and students to freely express their views. Personal statements by faculty and students do not represent the views of Collin College." I request that a similar statement be emailed out over the collective signatures of the Board of Trustees to all faculty and staff at every campus.

Indeed, such a statement—or one very like it—has recently been issued by a Collin College spokesperson.

In an article published on October 16, 2020 ([link here](#)), *Campus Reform* targeted one of my colleagues and me for public opprobrium based on public statements we had made about Donald Trump. Instead of responding with a long diatribe denouncing the protected political speech in question as "vile, hateful, and ill-considered," or as a setback to the progress the college has made this year, or as sowing political divisions in a time when our Nation needs to come together, the college spokesperson simply told the reporter, "While the college respects employees' rights to free speech, the opinions expressed were not made on behalf of Collin College."

If it was appropriate for the college to issue that statement to a so-called reporter from an utterly disreputable "news" source, it is surely appropriate for the college to officially affirm that position to all faculty and staff who received Dr. Matkin's October 12, 2020 email denouncing a faculty member

who “chose to post some political and other statements on her social media accounts”—as if that choice were somehow problematic, and not a simple matter of the same free speech rights at issue in the October 16 *Campus Reform* article.

What changed at Collin College between October 12 and October 16? I suspect that the change in the college’s public comments about faculty free speech may be related to the legal memo sent to Dr. Matkin by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). (You can read all of the legal memos and news releases FIRE has issued related to Collin College at this link: <https://www.thefire.org/cases/collin-college-email-alludes-to-discipline-under-personnel-policies-after-tweets-criticizing-vice-president-pence/>. If you scroll to the bottom of the page, you can select “News” for press releases and “Materials” for all legal correspondence in the case so far, including the letter to FIRE sent by Collin College’s attorney.)

As the FIRE memo notes, the October 12, 2020 email that Dr. Matkin sent to all faculty and staff was as inappropriate as anything in the college’s public statement of October 12, 2020. That email too should be retracted and corrected with a simple message unequivocally defending the free speech rights of all members of the Collin College community

Many Collin College faculty do not currently have confidence that their Constitutional rights are being respected or upheld by the college, and that lack of confidence has only been exacerbated by Dr. Matkin’s ill-advised email. Indeed, a very brave adjunct and a brave full-time professor replied-all to Dr. Matkin’s message saying that they were afraid they were putting their jobs at risk by publicly taking issue with his email, but that they could not stand by and see the further erosion of faculty rights to free speech.

I thank them for their extraordinary courage, and I trust that they will suffer no retaliation of any kind for expressing their views.

On their behalf, and on behalf of all my colleagues who have privately reached out to say that that they are afraid to speak up at Collin College on *any* issue, including this one, because they fear administrative retaliation, I respectfully request that Collin College affirm to the public and to all Collin faculty, staff, and students that the college upholds the right of free expression for all members of the Collin community and will not retaliate against faculty, staff, or students for exercising their fundamental First Amendment rights. And I request that the college administration then act accordingly and refrain from any retaliatory acts against professors, faculty, or students expressing their views in the public square.

At this political moment, I can’t think of anything our Nation needs more than a robust affirmation of the rights guaranteed to all citizens by the Constitution, and I can’t think of anything more important to the operations or reputation of an institution of higher education than a campus culture known for defending free expression rather than creating a climate of fear among faculty.

Thus, as a Collin College faculty member, I find it regrettable and frankly embarrassing that on October 12, 2020, Dr. Matkin suggested in his all-hands email that it is problematic for faculty members to post political opinions on their social media accounts. Similarly, I find it deeply disappointing that on that same day the college issued a public statement that criticized a faculty member for exercising her free speech rights, instead of robustly and unreservedly defending the principles of free speech and free expression.

Those official statements do not speak well of Collin College's ability to encourage critical thinking or make space for the kind of robust dialogue that encourages creative problem solving. Instead, both statements—official utterances of the college, not private opinions of a faculty member—are a stain on the reputation of the school and do a disservice to its students, who deserve to be taught by faculty who are not in perpetual fear of losing their jobs if they dare to express their personal views in the public square.

Thus, I am writing to you to request that you retract and correct those statements for the sake of the college's mission and for the morale of all its faculty. A statement over your signatures unequivocally and unreservedly affirming the fundamental First Amendment rights of all Collin employees would be a great morale boost to all faculty, no matter their political or religious views, at this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lora Burnett  
Professor of History  
Collin College – Wylie Campus