



March 10, 2021

Collin College Board of Trustees: Dr. J. Robert Collins, Mr. Andrew Hardin, Mr. Jim Orr,
Dr. Raj Menon, Ms. Stacy Anne Arias, Dr. Stacey Donald, Mr. Greg Gomel, Mr. Fred
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Dear Collin College Board of Trustees:

I am writing on behalf of the Texas Conference (chapter) of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). The AAUP was founded in 1915, and over the years has worked with university administrators and governing boards to define and promote fundamental values and standards for higher education. For example, our 1940 [*Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*](#) was jointly formulated with the [Association of American Colleges and Universities](#), and our [1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities](#) was developed in conjunction with the [American Council on Education](#) and the [Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges](#) (the latter of which should be of particular interest to each of you). As a result, our guidelines regarding academic freedom and shared governance are widely regarded by faculty, university administration, and governing boards alike as the “gold standards” of higher education.

The Texas Conference includes members from approximately 80 institutions of higher education across Texas, including many in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex (e.g., at University of Texas at Dallas, University of Texas at Arlington, University of North Texas, Texas Christian University, Southern Methodist University, Texas Wesleyan University, Texas Women’s University, University of Dallas, Texas A&M Commerce, plus Dallas College and many other two-year colleges).

We have been following the cases of Collin College professors Suzanne Jones, Audra Heaslip, and Lora Burnett; and would like to convey our strongest condemnation of their summary dismissals. You have already received letters from Dr. Mark Criley of the AAUP, and Mr. Adam Steinbaugh of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, detailing Collin’s College numerous violations of the fundamental principles of academic freedom, shared governance, freedom of speech, tenure, and due process (as well as Collin College’s own policies); and hence we will not repeat those here.

Rather, we simply urge the Board to intervene, and restore the contracts of professors Jones, Heaslip, and Burnett. In the case of Dr. Burnett, regardless as to whether you share (or do not share) her views, it is clear that she was expressing her opinions as a private citizen, and was not speaking in her capacity as an employee of Collin College. Accordingly, she should be free from institutional retribution. We are also highly dismayed that professors Jones' and Heaslip's dismissals were based, in large part, on their disagreement with Collin College's COVID policy. In addition to the egregious violations of academic freedom and shared governance as documented by Mr. Steinbaugh and Dr. Criley, this action is contrary to the ideals upon which this country was founded. Surely, you would agree that one of the hallmarks of our great democracy is the freedom to express our opinions and to disagree with governmental bodies and officials. Indeed, in the highest court in our land – the U.S. Supreme Court – justices regularly issue dissenting opinions, stating the reasons as to why they disagree with the majority ruling. Obviously, a dissenting opinion (in this, or any other context) does not mean that one does not support the mission and vision of the organization, or undermine it in any way. Moreover, a dissenting opinion does not indicate “a lack of collaboration and unprofessional conduct.” This is particularly true in the case of professors Jones and Heaslip. To not afford the very freedoms to professors Jones, Heaslip, and Burnett that our nation was founded upon is a violation of their individual rights, and an affront to our Constitution.

In closing, we call upon the Collin College Board of Trustees to intervene in this case and uphold the rights and civil liberties of professors Jones, Heaslip, and Burnett. As Board members, you each have a special obligation to ensure that Collin College maintains the ideals and values that form the bedrock of our great democracy. The U.S. is a beacon of light to people around the world, in large part because we value freedom of speech and tolerate dissenting opinions, unlike totalitarian states that persecute those who speak against it. Higher education, of all places, should be a bastion of freedom of expression and a forum in which we are free to challenge each other's opinions and perspectives, however uncomfortable that might be for some.

We welcome your input on this matter.

Sincerely,



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cc: Professors Lora Burnett, Suzanne Jones, Audra Heaslip
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