



Outlook

Reminder of obligations to academic freedom and resistance against autocracy

From Jacqueline Stevens <jacqueline-stevens@northwestern.edu>**Date** Tue 7/29/2025 11:08 AM**To** Michael H Schill <mhschill@northwestern.edu>; Julie Allen <julie-allen@northwestern.edu>; Kathleen Hagerty <nuprovost@northwestern.edu>**Cc** Rebecca Zorach <rebecca.zorach@northwestern.edu>; Jill Hardin Wilson <jill.wilson@northwestern.edu>; Ian F Hurd <ianhurd@northwestern.edu>; Jorge F Coronado <jcoronado@northwestern.edu>; Linda Gates <lhg984@northwestern.edu>; Lauren K Stokes <lauren.stokes@northwestern.edu>; Samuel Weber <s-weber@northwestern.edu>

Dear President Schill, Chair Barris, and Provost Hagerty,

I write in my capacity as President of the Northwestern chapter of the American Association of University Professors and, in particular, the Faculty Assembly AAUP-sponsored resolutions passed on April 21, 2025.

We understand that Northwestern may be under pressure to agree to certain restrictions of academic freedom and shared governance that violate not only AAUP standards but also the First Amendment.

There is a clear, incontrovertible record that the highest legislative body of Northwestern faculty overwhelmingly opposes the sort of capitulation of Columbia University recently announced. I write to urge you to resist such demands of Northwestern.

As a reminder, the first resolution, passed 383-86, states:

"1) The Board of Trustees, President, Provost, Deans, and the Faculty Senate shall actively defend academic freedom, including by publicly and steadfastly opposing an organized campaign that is bent on restricting our scholarly and public dialogues," Complying with unlawful demands of government officials is giving into extortion, as our members have pointed out. As an alternative, a leadership truly committed to the mission of this institution would pursue civil if not criminal remedies for extortion (under state law) when the Trump administration broaches such arrangements, notwithstanding Northwestern's politically inexcusable capitulation to date.

In addition to refusing to further corrode the rule of law, we reiterate the Faculty Assembly resolutions calling for you to rescind all policies that single out one group for a special definition of discrimination, continue E-Verify, and violate faculty due process rights. We request you enact the remaining policies as well, available here: https://www.northwestern.edu/faculty-senate/documents/faculty-assembly/faresolution_approved_4.21.25.pdf

Finally, President Schill, you have made the outrageous claim that the Faculty Assembly vote is not to be understood as representative of the faculty. This characterization belittles not only the governance documents of Northwestern and disregards the administration's failed effort to pass its own anti-democratic bylaw changes in 2021, it also reveals the discrepancy between your own self-opinion of your expertise on such matters as a lawyer and your actual objectives and knowledge about voter turnout. First, you personally participated in scheduling the Faculty

Assembly at 10 a.m. on a Monday morning, a time when hundreds of our colleagues teach. Second, the rules do not permit people to vote outside of this time limit. Imagine what voter turnout would look like in the United States if people could vote only in a five-minute window on a Monday morning. You set an extremely high bar to participation, and then, even when the faculty rally and meet it, autocratically proclaim a vote displeasing to you and roundly condemning your decision-making is not representative.

Leaving aside the Faculty Assembly Executive Committee's bad faith scheduling of the meeting, your analysis is still quite flawed. Either you do not know that the 10% quorum threshold tracks the voter turn-out in several mayoral elections of large cities, including Dallas, with a 6.1% turnout (Jurevich et al., 2016, https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/usp_fac/166/) or you know this and are dissembling. Again, if you really cared about faculty self-governance and were concerned that the 10% threshold is too low, we would have expected you to mention this before a vote that personally embarrassed you and others in the administration, and you would have scheduled the meeting time to accommodate a larger turnout, not to mention proposing bylaw changes to accommodate a wider window for voting. In fact, you might have even shown up at the Faculty Assembly meeting and made such arguments publicly, thus allowing faculty with expertise to question and evaluate whether you have any evidence whatsoever to suggest the 10% quorum is not sufficiently representative.

The Executive Committee reiterates our offer to meet with President Schill and Chair Barris, and in the interim requests that you refuse to use your leadership positions to further violate the Charter of this University and the laws of our country. And I personally am available at any time and venue to debate you on any of these matters, an invitation that someone who claims to value civil disagreement would be expected to accept immediately.

Sincerely,

Jackie (Stevens)

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<https://polisci.northwestern.edu/people/core-faculty/jacqueline-stevens.html>

<https://deportation-research.buffett.northwestern.edu/>

"Don't deter the huddled masses. Deter private prison kleptocrats who profit off them," News Tribune - McClatchy, July 11, 2024, <https://www.thenewstribune.com/opinion/article289849389.html#storylink=cpy>

"Solidarities of Citizenship," Frontiers of Political Science, 2023 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpos.2023.1141774/full>