

VIA ELECTRONIC AND US MAIL

August 7, 2012

Mr. Timothy M. Wolfe
President
University of Missouri System
321 University Hall
Columbia, Missouri 65211

Mr. David R. Bradley
Chair, Board of Curators
University of Missouri System
316 University Hall
Columbia, Missouri 65211

Dear President Wolfe and Chair Bradley:

The officers of Missouri Conference of AAUP, representing all members of the American Association of University Professors in our state, want to go on record in support of the resolution of MU Faculty Council of July 25, urging President Wolfe “to postpone the closure of the University [of Missouri] Press pending discussions with the faculty regarding the future of the Press.”

We have followed events in the press and have considered official statements from University of Missouri administrators and from some of the people who work for the University of Missouri Press or are associated with it. We must conclude that the May 24 announcement of the Press closure was ill-advised, particularly because it did not take into account the interests of the major stakeholders and the broad scholarly community that is served by the Press. Better consultation with Press staff and with university faculty could have saved Missouri’s flagship institution of higher education from this public embarrassment.

Our organization seldom takes official position on budgetary and other decisions internal to one campus or system. We feel obliged to do so, however, when such decisions apparently violate the key values of our Association: academic freedom, tenure, and shared governance. All three values are associated with the function of the Press, inasmuch as scholarly publication demonstrates academic freedom and is typically involved in tenure decisions.

It is the area of shared governance, however, where the announcement to close the Press raises the most serious concerns. This sudden announcement on May 24 followed a similarly sudden announcement of the closing of the Nuclear Science and Engineering Institute (NSEI) on March 15. Considerations to close or restructure important academic institutions must be taken in the clear light of day, having heard advice and objections, particularly from associated faculty. Otherwise, irreparable harm will come to the university.

We trust that doing such harm was far from the intentions of the administration of the University of Missouri. In a recent meeting with the MU Faculty Counsel, President Wolfe agreed that he did not consult with faculty and hoped not to repeat that mistake in the future. Though he also said he would not go back on this decision, Missouri Conference of AAUP would urge him to reconsider and restart the UM Press discussion in consultation with the faculty.

You have recently received a very informative letter from Robert Kreiser, Associate Secretary of the Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance, at the Washington DC office of American Association of University Professors. We join him in offering any help that we can give to improve this alarming situation, one that seems to threaten shared governance at the University of Missouri, as well as the reputation of the university in general.

Sincerely,

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Professor Larry G. Gerber, Chair, AAUP Committee on College and University Governance
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