



**Middle
East
Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc.

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January 11, 2016

Dr. Philip Graham Ryken
President, Wheaton College
Wheaton IL
via email: presidents.office@wheaton.edu

Dear President Ryken:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern about the decision of Wheaton College Provost Stanton Jones to recommend that “termination-for-cause” procedures be initiated against Dr. Larycia Hawkins, a tenured professor of political science at Wheaton. As we understand it, this measure is being taken because Provost Jones has deemed certain statements allegedly made by Dr. Hawkins to be inconsistent with the “Statement of Faith” to which Wheaton faculty and staff are required to conform. We regard this threat to revoke Dr. Hawkins’ tenure and terminate her as an unacceptable violation of the principles of academic freedom.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

As we see it, the question of whether what Dr. Hawkins may have said conflicts with Wheaton College’s Statement of Faith is irrelevant. The principles of academic freedom protect the right of all faculty members at institutions of higher education to express their opinions freely, and those principles cannot be subordinated to anyone’s judgment about whether or not those opinions conform to a statement of religious belief imposed as a condition of employment.

We therefore call on you to refrain from initiating procedures that might result in sanctioning Dr. Hawkins for any opinions she may have expressed. We further call on you to publicly affirm that Wheaton College respects the principles of academic freedom and the right of its faculty to express their opinions freely and fully.

Yours sincerely,



Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York



Amy W. Newhall
MESA Executive Director
Associate Professor, University of Arizona