



**Middle
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April 22, 2019

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Dear Colleagues,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern about the contract renewal of Dr. Thomas Abowd, Senior Lecturer in Tufts University's Consortium on Studies of Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora.

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 over 2,500 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.

We understand that during the late summer of 2018, when Dr. Abowd's teaching contract was up for renewal, he was subjected to what we regard as scurrilous attacks by a number of individuals and organizations who publicly demanded that he be sanctioned because they did not like some of the content of his Fall 2018 course "Colonizing Palestine." We are pleased that, in response to these attacks, Tufts University spokesperson Patrick Collins stated that "Tufts is committed to the free exchange of ideas and provides students with access to a broad spectrum of courses that enable them to become familiar with a variety of perspectives on important and complex issues." Mr. Collins further stated that "[w]e support all faculty members' right to academic freedom...recogniz[ing] that there are a variety of viewpoints and beliefs within the Tufts' community, and we embrace opportunities to foster improved understanding and engagement across divergent perspectives."

We note, however, that around the time of the attacks on Dr. Abowd Tufts University offered him a new teaching contract of only one year's duration, although the university's own guidelines state that Senior Lecturers can expect to receive five-year renewals except in the rarest of circumstances. A grievance procedure on this matter is currently under way, and we expect that as it proceeds Tufts University will adhere to generally accepted



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academic standards of equity and transparency in addressing Dr. Abowd's grievance. We urge Tufts University to uphold and vigorously defend the free speech rights and academic freedom of Dr. Abowd and all its faculty and students, so that they may teach, speak and write about significant issues of public concern, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, without fear of institutional reprisal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Judith E. Tucker', written over a horizontal line.

Judith E. Tucker
MESA President
Professor, Georgetown University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurie Brand', written in a cursive style.

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor, University of Southern California