

February 6, 2011



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

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Kenneth Starr
President, Baylor University
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Dear President Starr:

I write to you 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 disciplinary charges which Baylor University has brought against Professor Marc Ellis, and about his removal from his teaching and administrative duties without a hearing. We are concerned that the disciplinary procedures to which Professor Ellis is being subjected, which could result in his dismissal, may not conform to the standards widely accepted at institutions of higher education in this country and may be motivated by Professor Ellis' views regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If so, this would constitute a serious violation of Professor Ellis's right to free speech and severely undermine 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.

Last fall Professor Ellis was removed from his role as the chair of Jewish Studies at Baylor University without the benefit of a hearing. Although a hearing is apparently scheduled for the spring, our understanding of best practices, as defined by the American Association of University Professors, is that suspension of a faculty member before or during disciplinary proceedings is warranted only if "immediate harm to the faculty member or others is threatened by the faculty member's continuance." Unless your university can demonstrate a threat of immediate harm, we believe that Professor Ellis should be immediately reinstated and allowed to resume his teaching duties. More broadly, we call on Baylor University to ensure that any disciplinary proceedings against Professor Ellis be conducted in an open, fair and transparent manner, in conformity with accepted standards and best practices at American universities.

We are particularly concerned about the possibility that Professor Ellis is facing selective enforcement of university policies as a result of his political positions. Baylor University officials have denied that the disciplinary measures initiated against Professor Ellis are politically motivated, but we would welcome a statement from you making it absolutely clear that Baylor strongly supports the right to free speech, including on issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that it is firmly committed to protecting the academic freedom of its faculty.

Institutions of higher learning in this country and around the world have a responsibility to uphold and defend the principles of academic freedom. They must also be sanctuaries for the free expression of ideas and opinions. We call upon you to reaffirm your commitment to these principles and to ensuring that Baylor will adhere to generally accepted standards and best practices in disciplinary cases. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Fred M. Donner
MESA President
Professor of Near Eastern History, University of Chicago