



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**  
Michael Rothberg, Head

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Chancellor Phyllis Wise  
University of Illinois  
Swanlund Hall  
Urbana, Illinois 61801

Dear Chancellor Wise,

I am writing, as Professor and Head of the Department of English and Director of the Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies at the University of Illinois, to express my concern over reports that a job offer to Professor Steven Salaita has been rescinded. If it is true that you have declined to forward his case to the Board of Trustees after it passed through departmental, college, and campus-wide review, I would find this incident a troubling violation of shared governance and faculty autonomy in hiring decisions. (I should note that I was not involved in the hiring of Professor Salaita and that my comments here are not made on behalf of my department or initiative, but as an individual faculty member.)

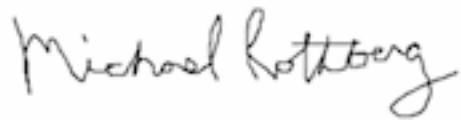
I have reviewed a large number of tweets sent by Professor Salaita during recent weeks. While I understand that they are partisan and angry messages—and therefore may be considered controversial—I do not agree that anything written there warrants firing or rescinding an offer that was already promised. Indeed, if academic freedom and the right to free speech do not guarantee controversial and offensive political expression—and especially expression outside the classroom—what are they good for?

I am concerned as well about the damage this decision is already doing to the reputation of the university and to our ability to hire top scholars. Indeed, a message has recently appeared on the Department of English Facebook page—in a comment to an advertised position in Creative Writing—that asks, “Why should any applicant trust that you will treat them fairly, given what your university [. . .] has done to Steven Salaita?”

In addition to my concern over the treatment of Professor Salaita—who has apparently had a job taken away from him and his professional reputation tarnished well beyond the moment when he could have kept his previous job—I am finally and especially concerned about what such a decision says about the administration's relation to the faculty. That members of the upper administration would, with limited or no consultation, countermand the decision of numerous faculty members who voted for Professor Salaita in an approved university search and who voted for his tenure at various levels of the university strikes me as a very dangerous and disheartening precedent.

My hope is that it is not too late to reconsider and reverse this unfortunate decision.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Rothberg". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the "Sincerely yours," text.

Michael Rothberg  
Professor and Head of the Department of English  
Director of the Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies