



Pedagogical Reck...

A Third AAUP Letter to Antioch's President

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Liz Flyntz



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On June 29, 2026, the American Association of University Professors wrote to President Jane Fernandes a third time about the case of Michael Casselli, tenured professor of sculpture and installation at Antioch College. The first two AAUP letters, sent on May 14 and June 2, [are here](#). This third letter is confirmed public and appears below.

June 29, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Jane K. Fernandes
President
Antioch College
418 South Hall
Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387

Dear President Fernandes:

This letter follows ours of May 14 and June 2 concerning the disciplinary action you have undertaken against Professor Michael Casselli. We have enclosed copies of those letters for your reference.

We regret that we have not received a substantive response from you. We therefore reiterate our concerns, which remain unanswered.

Professor Casselli has been banished from campus and suspended from his faculty responsibilities without pay, all without the affordance of a faculty hearing in which the administration would be called upon to demonstrate adequate cause and in which he could speak and present evidence in his own defense.

Moreover, his unpaid suspension is of indefinite duration, and his reinstatement is contingent on his meeting certain requirements. Even then, as you put it to Professor Casselli in a June 4 letter, completion of those requirements "does not guarantee a return to work." Instead, "Human Resources and appropriate institutional leadership" will conduct an additional review and retain "sole discretion" for determining whether to reinstate him. As our June 2 letter noted, a lingering, unilaterally adjudicated suspension of this sort is tantamount to dismissal under AAUP-supported standards.

We once again observe that the allegations against Professor Casselli are serious and that the sanctions imposed upon him are severe; both threaten his career and his reputation. Common decency, basic principles of fairness, and AAUP standards all call for them to be adjudicated before a representative body of his professional peers.

As you know, in 2010 Antioch University was placed on the AAUP's list of institutions sanctioned for serious violations of Association-supported principles of shared governance. The events in Professor Casselli's case only serve to refresh and underscore our concerns about conditions for shared governance at Antioch, including the faculty's primary responsibility for decisions concerning faculty status. Therefore, our correspondence about Professor Casselli's case will be included in our records pertaining to Antioch's sanction. We anticipate that the AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance would wish to

determine whether and the status of his case before it could consider recommending to the Association's governing Council that Antioch's sanction be lifted.

Sincerely,



Mark Criley
Senior Program Officer
Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

Enclosures by email attachment

Cc: Ms. Shalini Deo, Co-chair, Board of Trustees
Ms. Emily Siebel, Co-chair, Board of Trustees
Dr. Dean Snyder, Dean of Faculty
Professor Forest Bright, Chair, Arts Division
Professor Kevin McGruder, Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees
Professor Kim Landsbergen, Member, Faculty Promotion and Review Committee
Professor Jennifer Grubbs, Member, Faculty Promotion and Review Committee
Professor Rahul Nair, Member, Faculty Promotion and Review Committee
Professor Gretchen McNamara, President, Ohio AAUP Conference
Professor Michael Casselli

PDF link to the letter is below, for those who wish to read in full.

What the June 29 letter records

The letter opens by noting that no substantive response has been received from the administration to either prior AAUP letter.

The letter reads the administration's June 4 letter to Casselli as documentary confirmation of the framework the June 2 AAUP letter had projected. The June 4 letter (which formalized the conditions of Casselli's indefinite unpaid suspension, retained "sole discretion" over reinstatement, and stated that completion of the conditions "does not guarantee a return to work") is characterized in the June 29 AAUP letter as a "lingering, unilaterally adjudicated suspension" that is "tantamount to dismissal under AAUP-supported standards."

The letter then places the Casselli correspondence in the records of Antioch's existing AAUP sanction, imposed in 2010 following the treatment of tenured faculty during the

2008 closure of Antioch College and its 2011 reopening. The AAUP writes: “our correspondence about Professor casselli’s case will be included in our records pertaining to Antioch’s sanction.” The Committee on College and University Governance would consider the casselli case before recommending sanction removal.

A longer report on the case is forthcoming.

[AAUP letter, June 29, 2026 \(PDF\)](#)

The Board’s June 29 communication

On the same day the AAUP sent its third letter, the Board of Trustees sent an update to alumni and community members reporting on its June 17–18 meeting. Amid a report emphasizing fundraising success (a \$1 million anonymous donation, \$1.7 million raised through trustee efforts), commencement, and preparations for the HLC reaccreditation decision expected in August, the Board offered its position on the casselli case:

There is a distinction between a grievance, which addresses academic teachings (affecting tenure), and a complaint involving workplace behavior (applicable to all employees). The latter is a Human Resources concern.

As fiduciaries of Antioch College, the Board of Trustees recognizes that the determination of Human Resources matters belongs to the President of the College. The Board has performed its role to ensure that relevant policies and procedures have been followed and documented.

This is the framework being circulated to trustees and the broader community. The casselli case is not an academic freedom or tenure matter. According to the Board, it is an HR matter, under the President’s sole authority, and the Board has done its job by confirming that procedures were followed.

Why this framework does not hold

The handbook does not distinguish “academic teachings” from “workplace behavior” as categories that trigger different procedural tracks for tenured faculty. Section XX.A of the Faculty Personnel Handbook specifies that termination of a tenured appointment “will be considered by the President, the Faculty Promotion & Review Committee, and the Board of Trustees” (three bodies, not one) and that where

the facts are in dispute, the faculty member has the right to a hearing before all bodies that pass judgment on the case. The handbook does not carve out an HR exception. The trigger is whether the action could result in loss of tenured position and whether the facts are contested. Both conditions have been met in the casselli case.

The administration itself acknowledged this in February. The February 9 “Notice of Findings” letter (the administration’s own first written characterization of the January 12 incident as workplace-conduct violations) states explicitly that “the termination process for tenured faculty involves the President, FPRC, Board.” The February 19 termination letter cited the handbook’s “moral turpitude” provision, a conduct-based basis for termination for cause, which by definition is a matter for the full procedure under Section XX.A. The Board’s June 29 reframe (that workplace-conduct allegations against a tenured faculty member are HR matters under the President’s sole authority) contradicts what the administration itself wrote when it was characterizing the same conduct as grounds for termination.

AAUP standards do not recognize a workplace-conduct exception to tenure procedure. The 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, which Antioch’s handbook adopts by reference, establishes procedural protections for tenured appointments without regard to whether the underlying allegation is characterized as academic or as conduct. Regulation 7a of the AAUP’s *Recommended Institutional Regulations*, which the AAUP’s June 2 letter invoked, classifies punitive suspension as a major sanction “second in severity only to dismissal” and requires a dismissal-style hearing regardless of the underlying allegation category. The AAUP report *The Use and Abuse of Faculty Suspensions* is entirely about administrations misclassifying dismissal-consequence actions as personnel matters to evade procedural protections. The reframe the Board has adopted is the maneuver those standards were written to prevent.

This is a broader and more troubling structural problem. If a college president can unilaterally reclassify any conduct-adjacent dispute involving a tenured faculty member as an HR matter, and thereby remove it from the jurisdiction of faculty governance, then tenure protection is exhaustible whenever the administration alleges any conduct. Since virtually every dismissal case involves some allegation of conduct (insubordination, hostile behavior, policy violation, disruption), the reframe is a general-purpose device for exiting tenure procedure, not a narrow exception. Tenure remains formally intact

and functionally void, exercisable by administrative reclassification at will. That is the position the Board has now adopted in writing.

Making the President the sole arbiter of HR matters in a case brought by the President is not oversight. The Board's June 29 statement that it has "performed its role to ensure that relevant policies and procedures have been followed and documented" is a written attestation from the fiduciary body that the procedural record is sound. The President is the person who imposed the discipline, characterized the conduct, and (per the June 4 letter) is formally withholding the FPRC materials that would let the record be evaluated. A Board that ratifies procedural correctness without independently reviewing the procedures against the handbook has not overseen; it has deferred. Writing the deference down as oversight does not change what it is.

The required hearing still has not happened.

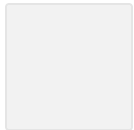
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Written by Liz Flyntz

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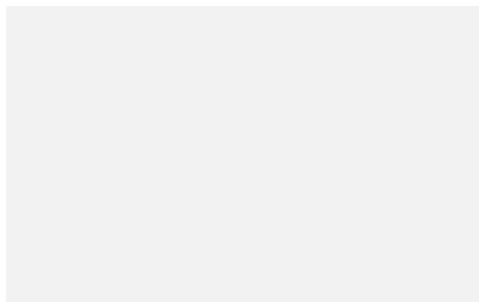
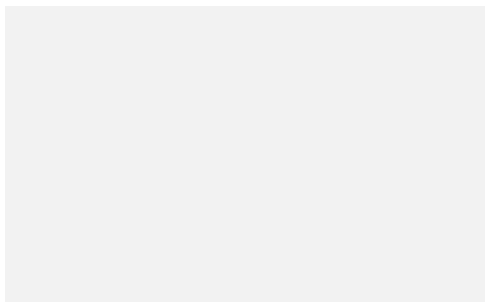


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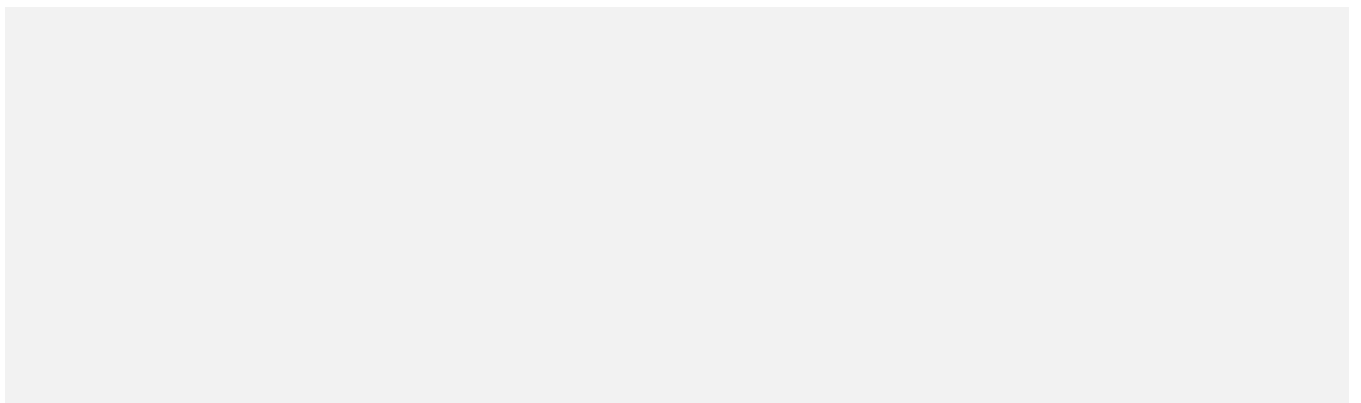
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