

Protect academic freedom at the University of Michigan

This is a copy of a real email sent to a MoveOn member. It may have been modified to protect the recipients' anonymity.

From: "Ian Robinson" <moveon-help@list.moveon.org>
Date: Wednesday, April 6, 2011 at 9:31 AM
Subject: Protect academic freedom at the University of Michigan

Dear MoveOn member,

My name is Ian Robinson. I'm a member of the Department of Sociology and the Residential College's interdisciplinary Social Theory and Practice program. **I'm writing to you today because academic freedom is under threat on our campus.**

It started in Wisconsin, after a University of Wisconsin professor commented on current events there in a blog post. The Republican Party of Wisconsin then filed a Freedom of Information Act request for access to hundreds of emails sent to and from the professor's university email account.¹

Just a few days later the Mackinac Center, a conservative think tank here in Michigan, filed a similar request for emails from members of the Labor Studies Center at the University of Michigan.²

The request is absurdly broad and meant to do only one thing—intimidate scholars who might write about labor issues in ways that the Mackinac Center disagrees with. **Nobel laureate Paul Krugman calls it "academic intimidation."**³

The Freedom of Information Act is meant to make government business more transparent—not to snoop through all of a professor's emails.

The University of Wisconsin fought back when it fulfilled the request by refusing to release private email exchanges among scholars, saying that those fall within the orbit of academic freedom.⁴

The University of Michigan should do the same. **Will you join me in signing a petition in support of our academic community?**

[Sign the petition to protect academic freedom on campus](#)

Academic freedom is a cherished value at any university. It means scholars are free to discuss and develop ideas—even controversial ideas—among themselves without fear of reprisal or premature disclosure of their thoughts.

Open record laws are meant to ensure good governance at public institutions, include public universities. They're not meant to police what academics write or think.

The Mackinac Center, which filed the request, hasn't even said why it wants them, but it's clear that it is trying to make it harder and more intimidating for researchers to discuss controversial issues.

The University of Wisconsin took a bold stand on behalf of its faculty and on behalf of academic freedom when it announced it would protect scholarly correspondence from release. Tell the University of Michigan to protect the academic freedom here too. We cannot afford to let politically motivated outside parties encroach on the academic

Click here to sign your name:

"Protect academic freedom at the University of Michigan by safeguarding academic email from frivolous disclosure requests."

Sign the Petition!

space that universities need to thrive. Join me in signing the petition:

<http://civic.moveon.org/foiaumich/index.html?id=&t=4>

Sincerely,

Ian Robinson

This email was sent through MoveOn's secure system. Your information has been kept private.

Sources:

1. "Conservative Think Tank Seeks Michigan Profs' Emails About Wisconsin Union Battle ... And Maddow," Talking Points Memo, March 29, 2011

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=207324&id=&t=5>

"Group Seeks Labor E-Mails by Michigan Professors," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2011

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=207325&id=&t=6>

2. Ibid.

3. "Academic Intimidation," *The New York Times*, March 25, 2011

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=207326&id=&t=7>

"American Thought Police," *The New York Times*, March 27, 2011

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=207327&id=&t=8>

4. "Chancellor's message on academic freedom and open records," press release, University of Wisconsin-Madison, April 1, 2011

<http://www.news.wisc.edu/19190>

Subscription Management:

This is a message from MoveOn.org Civic Action. To change your email address or update your contact info, please visit:

To remove yourself (MoveOn User) from this list, please visit our subscription management page at:

<http://moveon.org/s?i=>

[ABOUT](#) [PRESS](#) [CONTACT](#) [HOME](#)

Paid for by MoveOn.org Political Action, <http://pol.moveon.org/>. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.

MoveOn.org Civic Action is a 501(c)(4) organization which primarily focuses on nonpartisan education and advocacy on important national issues. MoveOn.org Political Action is a federal political committee which primarily helps members elect candidates who reflect our values through a variety of activities aimed at influencing the outcome of the next election. MoveOn.org Political Action and MoveOn.org Civic Action are separate organizations.