



February 17, 2021

Dr. J. Robert Collins  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Collin College  
3452 Spur 399  
Collin Higher Education Center  
Room 406  
McKinney, Texas 75069

*Sent via Electronic Mail (bcollins@collin.edu)*

Dear Dr. Collins:

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending liberty, freedom of speech, due process, academic freedom, legal equality, and freedom of conscience on America's college campuses.

I regret to inform you that Collin College has the ignominy of being named one of the 10 Worst Colleges for Free Speech.<sup>1</sup> Each year, FIRE publishes this list,<sup>2</sup> and Collin College's well-documented violations of its faculty members' First Amendment rights make it a worthy contender.

These actions include Collin College's retaliation against Professor Lora Burnett for her extramural political tweets, as well as its nonrenewal of Professors Audra Heaslip and Suzanne Jones for their criticism of Collin College's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to establish a local chapter of the Texas Faculty Association. These are only some of the violations of the First Amendment and academic freedom at Collin College that FIRE has been made aware of and continues to investigate.

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<sup>1</sup> *10 Worst Colleges for Free Speech: 2021*, FIRE, Feb. 17, 2021, <https://www.thefire.org/10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-2021>.

<sup>2</sup> *Worst Colleges for Free Speech*, FIRE, <https://www.thefire.org/resources/fires-annual-10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-lists>.

As members of the Collin College Board of Trustees, you have a legal and moral obligation to hold the College's senior leadership accountable. The First Amendment requires it, and the policies established by the Board commit you to action:

Faculty members have a right to expect the Board and the College District's administrators to uphold vigorously the principles of academic freedom and to protect the faculty from harassment, censorship, or interference from outside groups and individuals.

That has not been the case. To the contrary, Collin College's administration has engaged in unabashed efforts to retaliate against faculty members for exercising their fundamental expressive rights.

We call on you to ensure that Collin College expediently resolves each of these problems that put it on FIRE's radar as one of the ten worst colleges for free speech. It must immediately restore Heaslip and Jones to their positions, withdraw the written warnings issued to Burnett, and pledge to recommit to its obligations under the First Amendment.

Sincerely,



Sabrina Conza  
Program Analyst, Individual Rights Defense Program

Cc: Andrew Hardin, Vice Chair, Board of Trustees  
Jim Orr, Secretary, Board of Trustees  
Dr. Raj Menon, Treasurer, Board of Trustees  
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