

FIRE

Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

May 8, 2023

John R. Raymond, Sr.
Office of the President and CEO
Medical College of Wisconsin
8701 Watertown Plank Road
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226

Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail (officeofthepresident@mcw.edu)

Dear President Raymond:

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to defending freedom of speech,¹ is concerned by Medical College of Wisconsin's rescission of its facilities-use offer to the Wisconsin Association of Scholars for their May 12 Spring Symposium, motivated apparently, at least in part, by the scheduled speakers' views and the resulting "disruptive" nature of internal and external discussions about the event.²

Such a decision violates MCW's clear academic freedom commitments that students and faculty enjoy the rights "to learn and advance new knowledge"³—which commitments, contained in written policy documents like college handbooks, the Wisconsin Supreme Court has specifically held, are binding contractual promises with which the college must comply.⁴ It also runs counter to MCW's promises of academic freedom and freedom of expression it is obligated to honor by virtue of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North

¹ For more than 20 years, FIRE has defended freedom of expression, conscience, and religion, and other individual rights on America's college campuses. You can learn more about our recently expanded mission and activities at thefire.org.

² Alexa Schwerha, 'Leaves Me Speechless': Med School President Cancels Anti-Woke Speaker, Cites 'Safety' Concerns, DAILY CALLER (May 5, 2023), <https://dailycaller.com/2023/05/05/med-school-anti-woke-speech-canceled/>. The recitation of facts here reflects our understanding of the pertinent information. We appreciate that you may have additional information to offer and invite you to share it with us.

³ *Information for faculty*, MCW ACADEMIC FREEDOM, MED. COLL. OF WIS., (effective July 1, 2022) https://www.mcw.edu/-/media/MCW/Departments/Faculty-Affairs/Faculty-Handbook--July-1-2022_Final.pdf. <https://perma.cc/2JQ6-A2H9>.

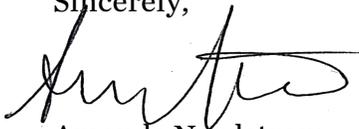
⁴ See, e.g., *McAdams v. Marquette Univ.*, 2018 WI 88, ¶84 (2018) (private Catholic university breached its contract with a professor over a blog post because, by virtue of its adoption of the 1940 AAUP Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom, the blog post was "a contractually-disqualified basis for discipline").

Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which requires that all accredited institutions to be “committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning.”⁵

MCW accordingly may not cancel events due to a potential controversy about speakers’ views, and FIRE calls on it to publicly reverse course and re-commit to meeting its binding academic freedom obligations in the future.

Given the urgent nature of this matter, we request a substantive response to this letter no later than the close of business May 11, 2023.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Nordstrom', written over a horizontal line.

Amanda Nordstrom
Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy

⁵ HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION, CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION, (Sept. 1, 2020), <https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html>.