



October 19, 2017

John A. Fry  
President, Drexel University  
3141 Chestnut Street, Suite 103  
Main Building  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear President John A. Fry,

It is with great concern that we write regarding the status of a political scientist and member of your faculty, Dr. George Ciccariello-Maher. We understand from news media reports and from statements by Drexel University that Professor Ciccariello-Maher has been placed on administrative leave with pay. Your administration has indicated that this action was taken on the basis of the judgment of the Drexel Police Department, following threats of violence the university has received, aimed at Professor Ciccariello-Maher and potentially others, subsequent to his postings on the social media site Twitter about the shootings in Las Vegas.

We fully respect your responsibility to provide for the safety of your faculty, staff, students, and all in the Drexel community; and, of course, we take no position on the merits or wisdom of Professor Ciccariello-Maher's messages. We also believe, however, that safety issues must be weighed carefully against the need to preserve academic freedom against different forms of "heckler's vetoes." This very substantial action was taken against the will of Professor Ciccariello-Maher; and it is disturbing if this measure was taken without consultation with any appropriate faculty committee, and as a result of his statements on social media, not any problems raised in the performance of his university duties.

The American Political Science Association is a scholarly association that represents more than 13,000 U.S. and internationally-based professors and students of political science. APSA brings together political scientists from all fields of inquiry, regions, and occupational endeavors within and outside academe to deepen our understanding of politics, democracy, and citizenship throughout the world. Our members research a wide variety of topics related to politics and human life, including political theory and Latin American politics, specialties of Professor Ciccariello-Maher. In addition to being on your faculty, Professor Ciccariello-Maher is a longtime member of the American Political Science Association and has been a member of our sections focusing on foundations of political theory and race, ethnicity, and politics.

Again, we cannot presume to know all the facts of the case, which may indeed merit such a strong measure. Still, we are conscious that pressures are growing on many universities, in this highly polarized period in American life, to curb controversial political expression by faculty members. The exploration of controversial political topics is at the very core of our disciplinary enterprise, and a central component of academic freedom more generally. As noted in the University's policy statement on academic freedom, faculty members are obligated to be mindful of how public statements may reflect on the instructor's employer and profession, but are to be free "from institutional censorship or discipline" when speaking or writing as citizens. Consequently, we urge you to continue working to resolve the situation so as to leave no doubt as to the University's commitment to academic freedom and to freedom of expression as articulated in Drexel's policy statement and December 29, 2016, message on academic freedom and freedom of speech.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Thelen, President

David Lake, Past-President

Rogers M. Smith, President-Elect

Steven Rathgeb Smith, Executive Director