

February 10, 2026

Dear Dr. Mason,

FHSU faculty members carefully watched the University's response to the social media crisis on campus last fall. In the wake of these events, several concerns have arisen involving free speech and academic freedom. The current Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between FHSU and AAUP provides free speech protection in multiple sections but particularly in Appendix C on Academic Freedom and Article XXVIII on Non-Retaliation. Faculty members generally have the right to speak as citizens and as scholars without fear of institutional censorship or discipline. The AAUP has also long stipulated free speech rights as essential to the entire enterprise of higher education. This goes double for faculty researching or teaching in politically sensitive areas.

The University's only statement about the crisis was correct in noting that it would not endorse Dr. Chance's personal social media posts, nor any faculty members' statements, as representing the University's opinion. Nonetheless, the apparent reprisals from the University, and the ensuing silence from the entire administration, conflict with the spirit of the MOA as well as the ethic of care that you often cite as foundational to your leadership.

Faculty understand that no right to speech is absolute. To move forward in their roles, they must know what the University considers to be indefensible when exercising their rights and of the disciplinary processes that would be used to terminate employment. At present, any statement made in a publicly accessible forum, including the classroom, is subject to public outcry and potential university sanction. Faculty members' duty to the truth and the free exchange of ideas in our teaching and research may put us at odds with politicians, businesses, donors, and community advocacy groups. In this context, faculty reasonably ask how we can trust that the University will protect them from retaliation because our work has called attention to a difficult issue or advances unpopular perspectives. Continued silence about a crisis does not foster trust or provide meaningful opportunities to strengthen policies, clarify expectations and support faculty in the future.

Thus, the FHSU faculty request a statement on how your administration has intervened, or will intervene, to protect faculty from public reprisal when we exercise our First Amendment rights. This statement should include clarification on the interpretation and application of relevant FHSU and KBOR policies, including whether faculty members' statements on social media are covered by the principle of academic freedom. Ultimately, if faculty members have a clearer understanding of the limits, expectations, and processes involved then they can make their own informed decisions about the exercise of their free speech rights, both in and outside the classroom.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eug Rice". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "E" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Eugene Rice, PhD

Professor of Philosophy

President FHSU AAUP/AFT