



January 29, 2021

**To: Chancellor Glenn Boyce
Provost Noel Wilkin**

**From: United Campus Workers of Mississippi
ucwmississippi@gmail.com
UCW-MS (CWA Local #3565)**

Re: Provost Noel Wilkin's letter to Dr. Mary Lindemann, AHA President

The members of UCW Mississippi wish to respond to Provost Wilkin's letter of January 7 to Dr. Mary Lindemann of the American Historical Association. The University of Mississippi's winter recess has delayed our response, but we want to make it clear that our concerns about Professor Felber's case and a number of other recent events at the University remain as urgent as they were in our December [communication](#).

We appreciate that Provost Wilkin's letter demonstrates his willingness to speak in defense of a faculty member (Professor Wilson) and that he has shown on many occasions a strong desire to work for the advancement of the University of Mississippi. We do, however, object strongly to the rationales detailed in the January 7 letter. We are dismayed to see Provost Wilkin's signature appended to the evasive semantics of the first rationale: that "Dr. Felber was not fired or dismissed prior to his contract term. Instead he was given a 12-months's notice of non-renewal." However it is phrased, we stand firm on this point: Professor Felber was fired without adequate review.

Our goal has never been to scapegoat Professor Wilson and we would discourage anyone supporting our cause from doing so. We repeat that we see Professor Felber's dismissal as part of a pattern of abuse and neglect on the part of the University's upper administration. As we explained in our December 22 statement, "the University routinely fails to uphold its commitments to support faculty excellence, increase and maintain diversity, foster healthy student environments, and transform the lives of people beyond the University." Provost Wilkin's attempt to narrow the focus to one faculty member's use of a disciplinary mechanism only distracts from systemic problems.

The documented evidence of abuse and neglect that we have assembled also contradicts Provost Wilkin's attempt to draw a bright line between the current situation at UM and "the stereotypes of our institution's past." Provost Wilkin's statement that the University is a fulsome supporter

of anti-racist and social justice work, and that Professor Felber's advocates are acting to marginalize such work, is misleading. No institution that is invested in redressing its patterns of harmful activity can simply assert, from its highest offices, that the task is complete. Those high offices must remain fully attentive to the voices of those who continue to be affected by systemic inequities. Without such openness, there can be no trust that the institution is actually proceeding towards greater equity and justice.

Finally, we want to emphasize that there is little comfort for untenured faculty in Provost Wilkin's letter. What it makes clear is that untenured faculty should understand themselves as subject to dismissal without a review process in which they and their colleagues can participate. It is troubling enough that an alleged failure to communicate with a supervisor has been made grounds for immediate dismissal. Far more troubling is the fact that Professor Felber was dismissed without prior progressive discipline, which is a protection provided to non-faculty employees at the University of Mississippi (see Policy 10000520), and that "the confidential nature of personnel issues" has been invoked to keep Professor Felber himself in the dark about the reasons for his dismissal. For untenured faculty — and indeed for tenured faculty who also await a new one-year employment contract each August — the implications of such rationales can only be detrimental to academic freedom, not to mention personal security.

We remain steadfast in our insistence that the firing of Professor Felber does not meet the standards of academic freedom, equitable institutional procedure, or reasonable transparency to which UM aspires. We also insist that his dismissal be reversed as part of a broader reckoning with the University's ongoing failures of equity and justice and the development of genuine dialogue between upper administration and all other members of the UM community.