

April 16, 2025

Amy Grier  
Associate Director  
University Human Resources

Dear Ms. Grier,

We write to share our concerns about the suspension and termination of five employees, four of them current students and one staff member, by University Human Resources. Employment is the means by which U-M students — especially those from lower-income families -- fund their education and living expenses; thus, termination of their employment amounts to an attack on their education and wellbeing, two fundamental aspects of our obligation to those who enroll at U-M. To willfully terminate student and staff employees for lawful protest, eleven months after the event and with no SSRR or legal charges is cruel, unethical, and at odds with U-M's stated commitment to students who face economic barriers.

All five of the people who were recently terminated were students on May 3rd, 2024. That day they were among a larger group of non-violent protestors who assembled outside the Museum of Art. One of the five students graduated later in May 2024; and five months later, she was hired as a Program Specialist of the International Institute. The state prosecutor saw no reason to press charges against any of the students involved at the protest at the UMMA. But, on April 7, 2025, eleven months after the event in question, University Human Resources charged the staff member and four current students with violating the [SPG regarding Violence on Campus](#). There is no evidence that the students behaved violently.

Human Resources abruptly suspended the Program Specialist employed by the International Institute without consulting with anybody in the International Institute or at LSA on the matter. Against the wishes of the program that depended on her expertise and commitment, Human Resources moved forward with their decision to terminate her employment on Friday April 11<sup>th</sup>. It should be stressed that, even though SPG 201.12, "Discipline," allows for a number of other sanctions, ranging from "oral reprimand" over "written warning" to termination, HR chose the harshest penalty available.

The International Institute reports that the Program Specialist position had been very difficult to fill, and that the staff member who was hired had been an outstanding employee. The Institute anticipates that they will not be able to continue their normal functions given HR's unilateral decision. We are told that the staff member's job performance was exemplary. Despite the fact that her presence at the UMMA protest preceded her hiring at the International Institute, HR intervened to fire her. As a staff

member, she did not have the right to appeal the decision, or to challenge the allegation that she violated SPG 601.18, but she did have bargaining rights as a member of the staff union, University Staff United (USU). The President of LEO confirmed that the University is refusing to bargain about her termination with Student and Instructional Services (SIS), the part of USU that has already been recognized by the University. Denying a represented employee their union representation in cases of discipline and dismissal is a sharp and worrisome break with precedent and a violation of the law.

Several additional student employees will be hearing from HR this week about the fate of their positions. HR has since admitted that the suspensions were not related to work performance in any way. These firings and suspensions mark an unprecedented and dangerous escalation in workplace repression at U-M at a time when our campus should be pulling together to protect its community members from political attacks and to protect the institution from federal interference in academic affairs. That the university should continue to target students and staff for speaking out against what a United Nations special committee, Amnesty International, and other human rights organizations have classified as a genocide in Gaza is unconscionable.

Our concern extends beyond these five employees. Schools like Columbia University, which excessively punished and censored students who protested against the war on Gaza, are still being hit with millions of dollars of federal funding cuts, while abandoning their institutional values. This is the fate of institutions whose administrators lose sight of the values of the institution by adopting authoritarian tactics against their own community.

For the welfare of these valuable employees, for the integrity of our institution, and for the good of our community of students, staff, and faculty, please reverse these suspensions and terminations.

Sincerely,

Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA)