



# AAG

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
*of* GEOGRAPHERS

January 26, 2021

Dr. Douglas A. Girod  
Chancellor  
University of Kansas  
Strong Hall  
1450 Jayhawk Blvd., Room 230  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
Via email: chancellor@ku.edu

Dear Chancellor Girod:

The American Association of Geographers (AAG) wishes to add its strong support to the statements of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), American Anthropological Association (AAA), American Sociological Association (ASA), and others urging you not to implement last week's policy decision by the Kansas Board of Regents, which makes it easier to suspend, dismiss, or terminate employees over the next two years, including tenured faculty members, without initiating the process of formally declaring a financial emergency.

We submit this letter to reinforce the importance of the essential principles of Academic Freedom and Tenure, originally released in 1940 and updated in 1970, a statement which the AAG has supported unflinchingly since 1963 and which is a vital support for academic freedom and teaching integrity in higher education.

Tenure and academic job security are crucial for high-quality instruction and proper oversight of long-range research, among other vital contributions of academia to the public good and the nation's economy. Only through the institutional continuity of the U.S.'s robust research community can our nation remain on the cutting edge of scientific progress, and our universities remain destinations for top minds from around the world. Furthermore, the diversity of research necessary to address all facets of a global pandemic cannot be overstated. While chemists and epidemiologists race for a vaccine in the immediate term, the geography community has studied the [movement of the COVID-19 virus](#), the [ethical concerns with health tracking applications](#), and the [impact of COVID-19 on postsecondary teaching and learning](#) — all of which have compounding effects on our nation as we move beyond the pandemic and start to recover. For other examples of critical nationwide geographical research during COVID-19, see the [GeoSpatial Fellows at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#).

Without a reliable future at their home institutions, researchers may not be able to deliver the necessary analyses and solutions for our nation's recovery.

Even at a time of forced austerity, the need for continued public investment in higher education, and particularly in experienced, mature faculty and researchers, has never been greater. While we recognize the budgetary constraints faced by universities at this time, we believe that faculty deserve the transparency of shared governance and a say in their own future as these difficult decisions are made. We call upon the University of Kansas to show bold, long-range leadership to support continued innovation in research and teaching among higher education faculty. The intellectual capital of your faculty is your greatest asset. Please act to protect it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GML', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gary M. Langham, PhD  
Executive Director  
American Association of Geographers