To Faculty at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign:

You received a mass email from Chancellor Wise on Friday, August 22, 2014, along with another mass email from President Easter, the Board of Trustees, and other members of the University Administration.

We write to provide some background and to urge you to consider carefully the questions of academic freedom and faculty governance that are at stake in the actions of the Chancellor, President, and Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

To keep informed, or to take action:

We are a loose coalition of University of Illinois faculty calling ourselves Illinois Faculty for Academic Freedom and Justice who have come together to respond. If you would like to learn more or get involved, email uiucfaculty@gmail.com. You can also follow on facebook.com/SupportSalaita.

The basic facts of the case:

Professor Salaita was offered a position as associate professor of American Indian Studies in October 2013 at the University of Illinois. The job offer went through all the regular procedures of evaluation and channels of approval that are involved in hiring tenured faculty to our campus, including a vote by faculty in American Indian Studies, an external review by scholars in his field at peer institutions, through the LAS Executive Committee, the campus Executive Committee, and the provost’s office. All that was left was the approval of the Board of Trustees. (It is routine for the Board’s approval to come after faculty have already begun their employment at the University.) Professor Salaita, believing that the offer was in good faith, resigned his previous position at Virginia Tech, prepared to move his family to Illinois, and was scheduled to begin teaching courses in August.

Without any consultation of faculty or the academic units involved, and without any public process, Chancellor Wise wrote to Professor Salaita on August 1, 2014 to tell him that she would not be forwarding his materials to the Board of Trustees for approval and that she would be rescinding the offer. Her actions represent a clear violation of the basic principles of shared governance and departmental autonomy. These actions also have disturbing racial implications. Based on documents obtained through an open records request, there is now evidence that outside political influence played a role in the Chancellor’s actions.

The impact thus far:

The actions and statements of the Chancellor and Board of Trustees have drawn the attention of thousands of concerned people and have resulted in profound and potentially irreparable damage to the reputation of our university. At this writing, more than 3000 individual scholars have pledged to refuse to have anything to do with our campus (including writing tenure or promotion letters). A rapidly growing number of scholars who had already been invited to our campus (including two Miller/Comm speakers for Fall 2014) have cancelled their visits. At least one major conference has had to be cancelled. American Indian Studies has issued a number of statements, including a vote of no confidence in the Chancellor, and others may soon follow.