***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

August 23, 2015

*41 Executive Officers at UIUC Call for the Reinstatement of Steven Salaita*

 A group of forty-one Executive Officers and campus leaders from across the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has released an open letter to Acting Chancellor Barbara J. Wilson and President Timothy Killeen. In the letter, the forty-one chairs, directors, and heads call for the reinstatement of Dr. Steven Salaita as Associate Professor of American Indian Studies. Dr. Salaita’s position was revoked in the summer of 2014 by then-Chancellor Phyllis Wise and the university’s Board of Trustees because of remarks he made on Twitter about Israeli actions in Gaza. Since that time, the campus has been the subject of an international boycott and has been put under AAUP censure. Indeed, the Salaita controversy has become a landmark case for discussions of academic freedom. In a recent court decision, U.S. District Judge Harry D. Leinenweber of Chicago declared that “the entire American academic hiring process as it now operates would cease to exist” if the university’s position in the Salaita case were upheld.

 After the recent resignation of Phyllis Wise and in the wake of revelations regarding previously undisclosed email exchanges between the Chancellor and certain advisors among the faculty and university administration, the time has come for decisive action. It is necessary to remedy clear violations of procedure in the decision to revoke Dr. Salaita’s appointment; to remove the stain on Illinois' reputation that the entire affair has caused; to bring an end to the boycotts that continue to harm many departments in the humanities and social sciences in particular; and to save the university and the taxpayers of the state from the costs of litigation in defense of a decision and process that were at best terribly flawed. The open letter asks President Killeen and Chancellor Wilson to use their influence to urge the Board of Trustees to reverse their position on Dr. Salaita’s hiring. The letter’s signatories come from several different colleges on the UIUC campus and some of the core departments in the university, including Chemistry, English, History, and Mathematics. The list of Executive Officers includes many distinguished scholars from the arts, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.

“The Salaita case has become an international symbol for the precariousness of academic freedom and shared governance in the contemporary university,” said Michael Rothberg, the Head of the Department of English and one of the signers of the open letter. “Until the university reinstates Dr. Salaita to his rightful position, our campus will continue to exist under a cloud of censure and boycott. The university needs to do the right thing: to reinstate Salaita and to take steps to ensure that future hiring is based purely on scholarly review by faculty members and not on political considerations or the influence of interests beyond the university.”

The complete text of the letter is included below:

Dear President Killeen and Acting Chancellor Wilson,

We the forty-one undersigned Executive Officers and campus leaders from departments and academic units across the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign urge you to help end the crisis that has plagued our university for more than a year. It has increasingly become clear that the decision to rescind Dr. Steven Salaita’s appointment as an associate professor with indefinite tenure in the American Indian Studies Program violated the principles of shared faculty governance and may also be legally liable. The decision has also inflicted harm upon the reputation and standing of our university.

The AAUP has censured the Urbana-Champaign campus for the violation of academic freedom. An ongoing academic boycott against our campus continues to adversely affect an important dimension of our intellectual livelihood. More than 5,000 scholars around the world, many of them prominent intellectuals, refuse to participate in talks or conferences at the University of Illinois. Such events are part of the exchange of ideas for which our campus has always been known, and their cancellation impoverishes the conversation on campus to the detriment of students and faculty alike. Over the long term, it threatens our competitiveness in bringing in external funding and recruiting distinguished scholars.

We are therefore asking you to use the authority of your offices to recommend to the Board of Trustees that they reverse their previous decision and reinstate Dr. Salaita at the next board meeting in September. We firmly believe that this step will help put the university on track toward ending AAUP censure and regaining its place among the most respected public institutions of higher education in the country. The decision to reinstate Dr. Salaita will also make it easier to resolve pending litigation and save the university community and state taxpayers from the high costs of defending a wrong decision in the court of law.

We ask for a meeting to discuss our request to restore the rightful stature of the University of Illinois.

Sincerely,

James Anderson, Head, Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership

Matthew Ando, Chair, Department of Mathematics

Antoinette Burton, Interim Director, Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities

C.L. Cole, Head, Department of Media and Cinema Studies

David Cooper, Director, Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center

Clare Crowston, Chair, Department of History

Jerry Dávila, Director, Lemann Institute for Brazilian Studies

Anna Maria Escobar, Director, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies

Michael Finke, Head, Slavic Languages and Literatures

Stephanie Foote, Chair, Department of Gender and Women’s Studies

Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, Interim Director, Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies

Greg Girolami, Head, Department of Chemistry

Waïl Hassan, Director, Center for Translation Studies

Stephanie Hilger, Head, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

Valerie Hoffman, Head, Department of Religion

Valerie Hotchkiss, Director, Rare Book and Manuscript Library

Jonathan X. Inda, Head, Department of Latina/Latino Studies

Jeffrey Eric Jenkins, Head, Department of Theatre

Lilya Kaganovsky, Director, Program in Comparative and World Literature

Brett Kaplan, Director, Program in Jewish and Culture and Society

Marcus Keller, Head, Department of French and Italian

Edward Kolodziej, Director, Center for Global Studies

Susan Koshy, Director, Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory

Soo Ah Kwon, Head, Department of Asian American Studies

Jean-Philippe Mathy, Director, School of Literatures, Cultures, and Linguistics

David O’Brien, Chair, Art History Program

Robert B. Olshansky, Head, Department of Urban and Regional Planning

Andrew Orta, Head, Department of Anthropology

Jesse Ribot, Director, Social Dimensions of Environmental Policy Program

Michael Rothberg, Head, Department of English

Kirk Sanders, Chair, Department of Philosophy

Spencer Schaffner, Director, Center for Writing Studies

Douglas Simpson, Chair, Department of Statistics

Anna W. Stenport, Director, European Union Center

Eleonora Stoppino, Director, Program in Medieval Studies

Andrew Suarez, Head, Department of Animal Biology

William Sullivan, Head, Department of Landscape Architecture

Jonathan V. Sweedler, Director, School of Chemical Sciences

Ariana Traill, Head, Department of the Classics

Robert Warrior, Director, Program in American Indian Studies

Assata Zerai, Director, Center for African Studies