



October 4, 2019

Dear colleagues,

We are writing to you after receiving the news from Dr. Mary Sue Coleman in late July that, owing to a change in membership policy made by the board over the summer, our universities would no longer be members of the AAU. This has now been confirmed in a letter we received from President McRobbie and Dr. Coleman. We confess to being dismayed and disappointed by this, for reasons that relate both to substance and the process by which this decision was apparently reached. Since the full membership has not had a chance to discuss this matter – and since we were advised that the decision was to be applied immediately and, thus, that we were not invited to the upcoming October meeting – we thought it best to set out our views in the form of this letter.

We fully understand the need for any organization to review its mission, principles, policies and practices on a regular basis. This is what we do in our own institutions. But such a review normally requires broad consultation, open discussion and a thorough analysis of the possible benefits and drawbacks of any changes being considered.

We were not aware that any such review was underway at the AAU, and were thus surprised when we were informed that the AAU had unilaterally terminated the membership of our institutions. The abruptness of the decision and the manner in which it was taken have left us perplexed. It is still not clear to either of us why the AAU proceeded effectively to expel McGill University and the University of Toronto from its membership.

Our reading of the AAU's bylaw indicates that removal of members requires a two-thirds majority of all members (including Toronto and McGill). According to longstanding practice, such a vote would be preceded by extensive deliberation by the members, in which the universities being considered for removal would have the opportunity to participate actively. Whatever the letter of the bylaws may stipulate, the path followed thus far would seem to fall well short of conventional standards of fairness, consultation and due process. There is no doubt that many may see this action as a parochial retreat from global engagement by America's leading research universities. That is certainly how it struck us.

McGill and Toronto became members of the AAU in 1926. Despite our location north of the Canada-US border, we believe the merit-based case in support of our original admission to the AAU was compelling, just as it remains today. Over the ensuing 93 years, our two universities have been engaged and committed to the AAU's mission and initiatives. Our predecessors have served as members of the AAU's Board and on key committees, and our universities have each hosted the semi-annual Presidents' meetings. As recently as last year, we hosted the Graduate

School Deans meeting in Toronto, and both McGill and Toronto have been active participants in the Undergraduate STEM Education Initiative.

While the institutional and political differences between Canada and the United States have often meant that the particular details of the issues on the AAU's agenda may not be directly relevant to our institutions, the shared experience in the face of broader forces and societal trends is obvious. These commonalities have made our participation in AAU meetings and programs worthwhile for us. We believe this has also added value for your institutions as well.

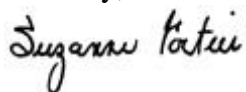
Issues such as protecting freedom of expression, addressing sexual violence and student mental health, enhancing the public standing of research universities, and fostering openness and engagement with the world – not to mention the core issue of making the case for stronger public support for research – are equally relevant on both sides of the border. The fact that we share these same challenges, yet often pursue somewhat divergent approaches, enriches our collective understanding and thinking, and expands the range of possible strategies and tactics at our disposal.

Moreover, at a time when the world is becoming more fractured and divided, when many governments are retreating from global engagement and erecting barriers (both perceived and real), it makes compelling sense for great research universities to be working together to counteract such trends, and to champion openness and the free flow of people and ideas across borders. We believe that our continued membership in the AAU for nearly a century has been a powerful statement in support of such ideals. Indeed, at a time when our sector faces significant issues of global reach, the AAU could consider taking a more radical step: leveraging its unique convening power to bring other leading world institutions into its membership.

We would note that the AAU's longstanding embrace of international engagement is not as exceptional as some have made it out to be. Both the Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities and the Association of American Medical Colleges have long welcomed Canadian members into their fold.

While we welcome the AAU's plans to strengthen its relationship with the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities, this does not alleviate the significant substantive and procedural concerns we have shared in this letter. We would ask respectfully that AAU management, the Board, and the full membership reconsider this regrettable and ill-considered decision.

Sincerely,



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McGill University



Meric S. Gertler
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