

6/5/2017

President John Bardo  
1845 Fairmount St.  
Wichita State University  
Wichita, KS 67260

Dear President Bardo,

I am grateful for the amazing opportunity I've had for the 10 years I've spent at Wichita State University. Serving as the Kansas Health Foundation Distinguished Chair in Strategic Communication / Professor, Elliott School of Communication has been an honor and a pleasure. I have found dedicated colleagues, an administration supportive of faculty innovation, and motivated and engaged students who have inspired me.

Sadly, after much soul searching, I have found it necessary to retire from the university effective July 1, 2017.

While I have found the support to engage in work that I believe has enriched students and communities, I find the climate in Kansas to be more and more regressive, repressive, and in opposition to the values of higher education including critical thinking, evidence based reasoning, global citizenship, and social responsibility.

I see this most clearly in the concealed carry policy that goes into effect July 1, which can't help but dampen open, frank conversation, so necessary for promoting intellectual growth and an informed citizenry. Worse, this ill-advised policy puts the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff at risk.

Clear, open, critical discussion cannot take place in an environment of threat and fear. Knowing that people will now be free to conceal and carry guns in classrooms without training and without licenses can't help but dampen the free exploration of ideas. In the current social and political climate, when civility and respect for diverse perspectives often seem to be in short supply, many people already feel marginalized and threatened. Guns on campus will make it that much more difficult for them to feel safe.

As someone who has experienced gun violence personally, I do not feel safe with guns in the classroom. I cannot do my best as a teacher, as an educator tasked with supporting students as they challenge and reflect critically on their personal beliefs, as they struggle with relationships and communication dynamics. I cannot guarantee my students that they will get the best from me. I cannot promise that I will encourage the growth that they are capable of in whatever directions they choose. I cannot tell them that they are safe to claim their voices, their truths, when someone next to them, who might have a different view, may also have a gun.

In 2007, I came to Wichita State because of the Kansas Health Foundation's mission to "improve the health of all Kansans." Their gift that funded my position was the largest Wichita State had received at that time. I have worked hard as a teacher and scholar to honor their commitment. In many ways, it has

been easy. Their vision corresponds with my personal and professional commitments to make a positive contribution to communities and to promote health and wellness. In recognition of my success in meeting these objectives while at WSU, I have won numerous campus, community, state and discipline-based awards as a teacher, mentor, and scholar.

In 2007, Wichita State University, the Elliott School of Communication, and the Kansas Health Foundation honored me with this position. I have embraced that honor. However, this gun policy is indication of a political context that threatens the health of all Kansans. This is no longer a context I can support. This is no longer a context in which I can work. I regret that I have to make this decision.

With deepest gratitude,

*Deborah S. Ballard-Reisch*

Deborah S. Ballard-Reisch, PhD  
Kansas Health Foundation Distinguished Chair in Strategic Communication  
Professor, Elliott School of Communication  
Wichita State University  
Wichita, Kansas 67260

Cc: Jeffrey Jarman, ESC Director  
Ron Matson, Dean, Fairmount College of Liberal Arts & Sciences