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March 16, 2026

Gerard J. Rooney, Ph.D.

President

St. John Fisher University

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Dear President Rooney:

The Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA) is a coalition of faculty members from across the country and across the ideological spectrum who are committed to upholding the principles of academic freedom.

The AFA strenuously objects to the retaliatory measures taken by the administration of St. John Fisher University (SJF) against Professor Alexey Ignatchenko. He resisted the administration's unwarranted and unreasonable demand to rush the submission of a final report in connection with a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant for which he was the principal investigator (PI). As a result, the Assistant Provost, Dr. Kristin Picardo, has refused to support any future grant applications for two years. In addition, the Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Anne Marie Fallon, has recommended that his application for promotion to full professor should not be considered at this time. These unfair actions were taken or approved by the Provost, Dr. Kevin Railey, and Dean Fallon even though they were made aware of (1) the broad discretion enjoyed by a PI to decide when a report is ripe for submission and (2) the written assurance by the NSF's Division of Chemistry Program Director, Kenneth Moloy, that a late final report was acceptable. Nevertheless, the Provost threatened to restrict access to external grants. The Dean went even further, threatening Prof. Ignatchenko with dismissal if he did not submit a final report immediately. Two weeks after the deadline, against his considered professional judgment, he complied. Thus, the university violated professional norms and its own *Faculty Statutes*, both of which safeguard the academic freedom of faculty researchers.¹ Succumbing to

¹ See <https://www.sjf.edu/media/about/leadership/provost/documents/FacultyStatutes2021.pdf>.

"Teachers are entitled to full freedom in determining the subject of their research, *grant applications, and in the publication of the results*, while remaining subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties. Research for pecuniary compensation from an outside



the administration's coercion, Prof. Ignatchenko has not only been injured in his reputation as a researcher, but he has been shut out from receiving any research grants for two years and denied the Dean's recommendation for promotion.

Prof. Ignatchenko is a tenured, associate professor of Chemistry at SJF. He was the PI on the NSF Award # 1955130, RUI: CAS: Mapping Catalytic Sites on Alkali Promoted Anatase Titanium Dioxide (TiO₂); https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/show-award/?AWD_ID=1955130. It had a start date of September 1, 2020, an end date of August 31, 2024, and a final report date of December 31st, 2024. In mid-December Prof. Ignatchenko wrote to Dr. Moloy, seeking guidance on how to proceed with respect to the final report. By December 2024, the grant had resulted in only two publications, and at least three more were expected. Dr. Moloy instructed him to hold back the final report until all results were published. His email was shared with Provost Railey, associate provost Picardo, and Dean Fallon. Nevertheless, they commanded that a final report be filed on the original, official due date. Initially, Prof. Ignatchenko refused, pointing to the written guidance of Dr. Moloy. In an exaltation of form over substance, the Dean threatened to fire Prof. Ignatchenko if he did not meet the deadline, even though he and the Dean were well aware of the advice of the NSF Program Director. And, one would think that the Provost and Dean were equally well aware of the norm regulating the meeting of NSF "deadlines." As the AFA understands after consulting with university-level researchers, the PI has the exclusive right to decide when to submit a final report. Although grants "belong" to the university, this fact is never invoked to meddle with a faculty member's research and, in particular, with the PI's determination that a grant is ripe for a final report. The reason for these self-imposed limitations is that such a decision falls within the heartland of academic freedom.

Faced with the Hobson's choice between dismissal and damage to his professional reputation, two weeks after the deadline, Prof. Ignatchenko backed down and drafted the final report, despite the incomplete published results and against the advice of the responsible NSF program director. And, although he dodged a bullet of dismissal by surrendering his academic freedom, he was still penalized by losing the university's support in this year and next for grants and having his application for promotion damaged by the Dean's refusal to recommend.

The threats and penalties imposed on Prof. Ignatchenko are at odds with the robust academic freedom guaranteed by SJF in its *Faculty Statutes*, which indeed

source must be based upon a written understanding with the Dean, the Provost prior to the project being undertaken." Id. at § 5.1(a) (emphasis added).



singles out for protection “teaching, *research* and service.”² The AFA urges the university to reverse course and uphold Prof. Ignatchenko’s academic freedom. In particular, the President’s Office should instruct the Provost and Dean to support his grant applications and disregard the Dean’s unreliable recommendation to shelve consideration of Prof. Ignatchenko’s promotion.

Sincerely,

NAME

Academic Committee
Academic Freedom Alliance

cc: Ann Marie Fallon, Ph.D.
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² *Id.*