

# Emails from the President of George Mason University, April 2018

From: All salaried and nonstudent wage employees <[GMU-STAFF-L@listserv.gmu.edu](mailto:GMU-STAFF-L@listserv.gmu.edu)> on behalf of Office of the President <[gmpres@gmu.edu](mailto:gmpres@gmu.edu)>  
Sent: Friday, April 27, 2018 8:16:26 PM  
To: [GMU-STAFF-L@listserv.gmu.edu](mailto:GMU-STAFF-L@listserv.gmu.edu)  
Subject: A Message from President Ángel Cabrera

Dear Colleague:

As a result of a FOIA request, last week I was made aware of a number of gift agreements that were accepted by the university between 2003 and 2011 and raise questions concerning donor influence in academic matters. The gifts were in support of faculty positions in economics and granted donors some participation in faculty selection and evaluation. Except for the most recent one, these agreements have expired.

The agreements did not give donors control over academic decisions, and all but the earliest of these agreements explicitly stated that the final say in all faculty appointments lies in university procedures. Yet these agreements fall short of the standards of academic independence I expect any gift to meet.

Since I arrived at Mason in 2012, I have made it a priority to have all gift agreements clearly uphold our commitment to academic independence. As I have stated before, gifts may be earmarked for programs, scholarships or faculty support, but donors may not determine what is taught, what student is funded, or what professor is hired. If these terms are not acceptable to donors, the gifts are kindly declined.

Fortunately, most donors understand and respect our firm commitment to academic independence, which has made it possible for our fundraising to reach unprecedented levels. Philanthropy is vital for achieving our mission of inclusive excellence. I am grateful to all donors who are willing to invest in our students and our university.

Sincerely,  
Ángel

From: Office of the President  
Sent: Monday, April 30, 9:05 PM  
Subject: A Message from President Ángel Cabrera  
To: [gmu-staff-l@listserv.gmu.edu](mailto:gmu-staff-l@listserv.gmu.edu)

Dear Colleague:

Given the discovery of problematic gift agreements, which I communicated last Friday (see below), I have requested a thorough review of all active donor agreements supporting faculty positions throughout the university to ensure that they do not grant donors undue influence in academic matters. I have also ordered a comprehensive review of our gift acceptance policies and practices to ensure that they provide strong protection for our academic independence. I look forward to actively collaborating with faculty in this process and will work with Faculty Senate to explore how best to accomplish this.

If, in the course of the aforementioned reviews, we identify any agreements, policies or practices that compromise our academic independence, we will take swift and transparent corrective action.

With regards to the one still-active gift agreement in support of the Economics Department, which I mentioned in my earlier message, the donor has agreed to void the April 11, 2011 agreement and transfer the remaining \$67,935 of the pledged gift to the university for general support.

Regards,  
Ángel