

Statement on Faculty Terminations at Newman University

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On October 25, Newman University, one of only three institutions granting bachelor's degrees in the city of Wichita, abruptly announced, in the middle of the fall semester, that they would be making drastic cuts to their curricular offerings. The university has decided to eliminate eight undergraduate majors: English, finance, history, marketing, mathematics, philosophy, social work, and theater.

As part of this realignment, Newman has dismissed 10 members of their faculty, many of them tenured professors with decades of service to the university. These cuts come at a time when we see similar faculty dismissals at institutions across the country, disproportionately concentrated in the disciplines in the liberal arts and sciences that are the cornerstone of a modern American university education. And they come at a moment when public universities across the state of Kansas are being mandated by the Board of Regents to undertake a surprise review of academic programs—again, disproportionately concentrated in the arts and sciences—with the potential for mandated program cuts at the end of this academic year.

I would like to take this opportunity to make two important points.

First, as colleagues in the noble profession of higher education instruction, I think that we, as the faculty of Wichita State University, owe it to our colleagues at Newman to show support and compassion for those who, through no fault of their own, will soon be unemployed.

Second, it is important to recognize that the cuts at Newman will have a profound impact not just on the faculty who will lose their posts, but also on the academic offerings, and the intellectual culture, of the entire South Central Kansas region. As I stated earlier, Newman is one of just three BA-granting institutions in this major American city. With the loss of these majors, it is more imperative than ever that Wichita State University, the leading institution of higher learning for the entire region, redouble its efforts to support its existing array of academic offerings. There are now only two places—or, in some cases, just one—in the entire metro area where a kid from Wichita can go to get a degree in the fields slashed by Newman.

Wichita State University proudly, and rightly, touts its status as an “urban-serving” institution. The urban community that we serve is the community of Wichita and its surrounding region. As other universities retreat from their commitment to offering a comprehensive education to the students of our community, it is incumbent upon us, as the leading institution in the region, to maintain that robust commitment to a broad university education.

To that end, I will be offering a resolution later in this meeting that reiterates the points I have made here, and it is my hope that it will have the support of the members of the Faculty Senate.