

STEVEN PINKER

Harvard College Professor
Johnstone Family Professor



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Sir Stephen Wall
Chair, UCL Council
University College London
London, UK

June 1, 2009

Dear Sir Stephen,

We are colleagues of Professor Heather van der Lely and are writing to express our strong concern about her summary suspension and enforced silence by University College London.

Professor van der Lely has been barred from entering her laboratory, accessing her data, managing her grants, using her email, and communicating with her students and colleagues at UCL. This is an extraordinary and unjust punishment. The career of a scientist depends on continuous interaction with students, collaborators, funding agencies, and research subjects. This is especially true for a scientist like Professor van der Lely, who made her mark by identifying and tracking a unique clinical population. To bar her from all research activities during a pending investigation is to threaten her scientific career.

We do not know the nature of UCL's case against Professor van der Lely, but have surmised that it does not involve anything resembling academic misconduct. Even if there were such a charge, it would be inappropriate to treat her as guilty before a fair and open investigation has established the facts. In an era in which the world's major universities and scientific organizations are engaged in soul-searching over the underrepresentation of women in science and the history of unfair treatment that has contributed to it, we are shocked that UCL should be so cavalier about endangering the career of an internationally acclaimed female scientist.

We are also concerned about the disrespect that UCL has shown to the values of free speech and open communication. Scholars belong to worldwide community. For a university to bar its own faculty and students from communicating with a colleague on

research matters, and to attempt to make her simply disappear from the scholarly landscape, is an affront to the liberal values that are the basis of a modern university.

The administration's harassment and arbitrary decisions are a disservice to the scientific community and the reputation of University College London. We call on the administration to reinstate her, and to treat her according to principles of fairness and due process.

Sincerely,

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