June 5, 2015

VIA US Mail and E-Mail To:
James F. Jones Jr., President
Sweet Briar College
134 Chapel Road
Sweet Briar, VA 24595
president@sbc.edu

RE: Closure of Sweet Briar College

Dear President Jones:

The American Association of University Professors observed with deep regret that Sweet Briar College held its final commencement on Sunday, May 17, 2015, its board of trustees having voted to close the college. That sad day for faculty, students, staff, and alumnae was made more so by the manner in which the board reached its decision. On March 3, 2015, with no warning, the board determined the college's fate without any faculty participation, in evident disregard of widely accepted AAUP-recommended governance standards, as set forth in the Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, jointly formulated by AAUP, the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges. The board acted in secrecy, even though for two years the college's faculty had been developing alternative curricular and programmatic scenarios to assure Sweet Briar's survival.

It is not clear at the date of this writing, moreover, that the institution will take steps consistent with the following provision from On Institutional Problems Resulting from Financial Exigency: Some Operating Guidelines: when the situation is such “as to warrant cessation of operation, the institution should make every effort in settling its affairs to assist those engaged in the academic process so that, with minimal injury, they can continue their work elsewhere.”

What has happened at Sweet Briar is tragic. Regrettably, other small private liberal arts colleges also face enrollment and financial challenges that may lead them to consider closure. Each case will be unique, but Sweet Briar must not serve as a model for acceptable procedures. The AAUP may not be able to alter a lamentable trend, but the Association insists and will continue to insist that representative faculty members participate in any discussions concerning closure and that AAUP protocols be followed.

Sincerely,

Rudy Fichtenbaum, President

Henry Reichman, First Vice-President and Chair, Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure

Charles Baker, Chair Committee on College and University Governance