

# **Free and Open Academic Inquiry and Debate on Our Campuses is Essential to Our Democracy and National Well-being**

**March 3, 2022**

Colleges and universities exist to examine complex issues, challenges, and ideas, and to provide a forum in which issues and opinions can be explored and openly debated. In our intensely politicized and divided country, with social media and societal silos coarsening already heated conversations, this can be extraordinarily challenging. Yet, fostering a rigorous and civil exchange of ideas has never been more important. To best serve American society, higher education institutions are committed to transparent intellectual inquiry and academic excellence, free speech, and civil discourse. It is incumbent on our governmental institutions to share and support this commitment.

Efforts to suppress inquiry, curb discussion, and limit what can be studied violate the basic principles of free speech and an open exchange of ideas, and undermine the very purpose of higher education. Nonetheless, some elected officials have proposed measures foreclosing evaluation of complex and challenging ideas.

The undersigned higher education associations and organizations—representing two- and four-year, public and private colleges and universities—believe this development threatens our civic health and the ability of the United States to compete globally. If American higher education is to continue to support our economy and national security as we always have done, an unshakable commitment to robust intellectual inquiry and engagement is required.

Controversial and contentious topics deserve a place in the curriculum, but no matter how vigorous the classroom discussion, it should be respectful. Some campus speech is unacceptable, such as speech that violates the law, defames individuals, or threatens violence. Outside a few narrow exceptions, proposals to ban speech based on the idea expressed are not only constitutionally suspect but fundamentally at odds with the values of a free and open society.

All members of the campus community must be able to speak their minds freely, even if some hold opinions that others find objectionable, factually unsupportable, or abhorrent. The answer to speech with which one disagrees is more speech, not enforced silence. Open academic inquiry and vigorous debate are core values of higher education, and America generally, and we must never waiver in our commitment to these vital principles.

Sincerely,

American Council on Education  
Achieving the Dream  
ACPA-College Student Educators International  
American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare  
American Association of Colleges and Universities  
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education  
American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
American Association of Community Colleges  
American Association of Directors of Psychiatry Residency Training  
American Association of Physics Teachers  
American Association of State Colleges and Universities  
American Association of University Professors  
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges  
American Dental Education Association  
American Indian Higher Education Consortium  
American Mathematical Society  
American Society of Biomechanics  
Asociación de Colegios y Universidades Privadas de Puerto Rico (ACUP) [The  
Association of Private Colleges and Universities of Puerto Rico]  
Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA)  
Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)  
Association for Women in Mathematics  
Association of American Medical Colleges  
Association of American Universities  
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities  
Association of College and University Housing Officers-International  
Association of College Unions International  
Association of Community College Trustees  
Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges  
Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU)  
Association of Independent Colleges & Universities in Massachusetts  
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Pennsylvania  
Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Rhode Island  
Association of Independent Colleges of Arts & Design  
Association of Independent Kentucky Colleges and Universities  
Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities  
Association of Pathology Chairs  
Association of Presbyterian Colleges & Universities  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities  
Association of Research Libraries  
Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors  
Association of Vermont Independent Colleges (AVIC)  
Biophysical Society  
Campus Compact

Council for Christian Colleges & Universities  
Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities  
Common App  
Conference for Mercy Higher Education  
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges  
Consortium of Universities of the Washington Metropolitan Area  
Consortium on Financing Higher Education  
Council for Advancement and Support of Education  
Council for Opportunity in Education  
Council of Graduate Schools  
Council of Independent Colleges  
Council of Independent Nebraska Colleges Foundation  
Council on Governmental Relations  
Council on Social Work Education  
EDUCAUSE  
Graduate Management Admission Council  
Great Lakes Colleges Association  
Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work  
Higher Education Consultants Association  
Higher Learning Commission  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities  
Independent Colleges of Washington  
Kansas Independent College Association  
Louisiana Association of Independent Colleges and Universities  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators  
NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education  
National Association for Campus Activities  
National Association for College Admission Counseling  
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO)  
National Association of College and University Business Officers  
National Association of Colleges and Employers  
National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education  
National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities  
National Association of System Heads  
New American Colleges and Universities  
New England Commission of Higher Education  
New Hampshire College and University Council  
NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation  
NODA-Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education  
North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities  
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities  
Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities  
Phi Beta Kappa Society

State Higher Education Executive Officers Association  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC)  
Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities  
The Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors  
WASC Senior College & University Commission (WSCUC)  
Yes We Must Coalition