

CSUS Council for Academic Freedom

We seek to promote the foundational role of academic freedom and free speech at CSUS.

Concerns: A growing number of faculty at CSUS, as well as across the country, have concerns about the declining role of free speech and academic freedom in universities. Here are a few of them:

1. The conformity and homogeneity of views expressed on campus is undermining the mission of the university to educate students on a wide range of diverse perspectives and to encourage open inquiry and debate.
2. Large percentages of students report self-censoring and not feeling at liberty to express dissenting views in the classroom or on campus, and they fear negative social consequences from their peers.^{1 2}
3. Large percentages of students report that campuses need to foster more viewpoint diversity.³
4. A significant proportion of the political and ideological views held in the population at large are not being represented, given voice, or explored in academic settings.
5. Cancel culture threatens to stifle open, nuanced discussion between faculty and students.⁴
6. The increasing presence of bias incident report teams who investigate faculty, staff, and students for alleged incidents of bias are having a chilling effect on campus free speech. The looming possibility of being investigated for anonymously reported and vague offenses without defense narrows the range of viewpoints faculty and students are willing to express or disagree.⁵
7. Increasingly, new faculty hires are required by the administration to demonstrate particular ideological commitments as a condition of appointment. The requirements can amount to compelled speech, ideological litmus tests, or fealty oaths.
8. Administrative funding for new faculty positions is increasingly contingent on those faculty demonstrating their commitment to a narrow range of acceptable political and ideological ideas, many of which are hotly contested within academia and the disciplines.
9. "Safety" language in administrative policy and university communications and overly prescriptive recommendations for inclusivity have been expanded to compromise a wide range of ordinary speech.
10. University administrations and faculty groups have increasingly made public pronouncements about social and political matters that imply that there is a single, uniform view on campus. The

¹ The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. (September, 2023). "Public perceptions of freedom of expression on university campuses paints a complex picture"

<https://apnorc.org/projects/public-perceptions-of-freedom-of-expression-on-university-campuses-paints-a-complex-picture>

² Heterodox Academy (March 22, 2023) "Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed" <https://heterodoxacademy.org/reports/2022-campus-expression-survey-report/>

³ Heterodox Academy (March 22, 2023) "Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed" <https://heterodoxacademy.org/reports/2022-campus-expression-survey-report/>

⁴ Heterodox Academy (March 22, 2023) "Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed" <https://heterodoxacademy.org/reports/2022-campus-expression-survey-report/>

⁵ FIRE (2017) "Report on Bias Reporting Systems."

<https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/bias-response-team-report-2017>

institutional endorsements often have a chilling effect on faculty and students who might disagree with the “institutional” position.⁶

The Function of Free Speech at a Liberal Arts University:

Two essential functions of a liberal arts education are to discover knowledge and develop students’ minds. In order for us to grow intellectually, morally, socially, to develop our full potential as human beings, and to develop respect for all of humanity, we must all have sustained access to a broad set of diverse ideas, principles, and opinions. No individual or group has a perfect grasp on the truth; we are all flawed, limited, and constrained by our ideas. We need each other to challenge, confront, test, and investigate our beliefs to better find the truth. No opinion or idea ought therefore to be silenced. John Stuart Mill, the famous British philosopher, gives the most important historical version of this argument in *On Liberty*:

“the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth produced by its collision with error.”

The university classroom and campus, therefore, requires diversity of opinion. The university should provide a forum for a broad range of ideas so that we may all reflect on those views, vet them, debate them, correct them, and incorporate them into our understanding of the world. Being confronted with ideas that we disagree with gives each of us the opportunity to discover our own mistakes, develop the intellectual courage and maturity to consider the merits and flaws of all arguments, including our own, and it allows us to then arrive at a synthesis of ideas that better approximates the truth.

The university betrays its purpose when it strays from the foundational goals of protecting free speech and academic freedom.

Goals: We would like to form a CSUS Council on Academic Freedom that is dedicated to correcting some of these imbalances. We seek to:

- Form a coalition of faculty at CSUS who wish to preserve and protect academic freedom.
- Sponsor discussions about academic freedom, free speech, and heterodoxy.
- Host talks to promote academic freedom and free speech.
- Provide a platform for a host of nuanced perspectives on campus.
- Normalize the open, civil discussion of diverse and opposing viewpoints and model rational disagreement.
- Broaden the range of political, social, moral, and ideological discourse.
- Promote principles of institutional neutrality, as described in the [Kalven Report](#).
- Prevent political or ideological requirements for the appointment or promotion of faculty.
- Advocate for students and faculty who are attacked for expressing their viewpoints.
- Sustain the integrity and faculty control of disciplinary curricula.
- Encourage the university to incorporate and promote the protection of free speech and open debate more directly in its stated mission and imperatives.

⁶ The benefits of institutional neutrality as described in the [Kalven report](#) have been compromised.

- Propose a senate resolution embracing the values of free-inquiry and supporting the protection of free speech on campus.
- Teach students about the vital role of disagreement and diverse, nuanced viewpoints in learning.
- Advocate for clear distinctions between free speech, academic freedom, civil disobedience, and lawful behavior on campus that is fair to all students.

If you are interested in being involved, or you would like to receive information about this council's activities, please email Prof. Matt McCormick, CSUS Philosophy, at mccormick@csus.edu

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