

BLUEPRINT FOR REFORM

THE JAMES G.
MARTIN
CENTER
FOR ACADEMIC
RENEWAL

Viewpoint Diversity

He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion...Nor is it enough that he should hear the opinions of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them...he must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Why foster and protect viewpoint diversity?

Viewpoint diversity is essential to the academic mission of colleges and universities.¹ Academic freedom, open inquiry, honest debate, and the search for truth rely on diverse viewpoints being welcomed and protected on campus.

In the past three decades, university faculty and administrators have become overwhelmingly liberal. This orthodoxy of opinion is bad for academic research, students learning, and for universities' respect and support in the eyes of the public.

1. To read more from the Martin Center about the importance of viewpoint diversity, visit: <https://www.jamesmartin.center/tag/viewpoint-diversity/>

Lack of viewpoint diversity on campus is fundamentally driven by political polarization.

Across all disciplines, very few faculty members consider themselves conservative.² Only four percent of faculty in humanities departments and five percent of faculty in social sciences identify as conservative.³ In the 15 years between 1995 and 2010 the academy went from leaning left to being almost entirely on the left.⁴

2. Gross, N. and Simmons, S. (2007) "The Social and Political Views of American Professors."

3. Shields, J.A. and Dunn, J. M. (2016) *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University*.

4. Langbert, M., Quain, A. J., & Klein, D. B. (2016). "Faculty voter registration in economics, history, journalism, law, and psychology." *Econ Journal Watch*, 13(3), 422-451.

While self-selection can explain a lot of this disparity, overt discrimination against conservatives is also to blame. In sociology, over 30 percent of faculty members reported that they would not support hiring Republican faculty.⁵ Similar discriminatory practices have been observed in psychology departments.⁶ The more openly liberal the faculty or department is, the more viewpoint discrimination occurs.⁷

The effects of this viewpoint orthodoxy are pernicious. Over the past decade, there has been an increasing drift on campuses away from academics and towards activism. Some disciplines—especially area, ethnic, and gender studies—are merely ideological echo chambers. Many administrators and faculty on the far left have illiberal attitudes toward expression and civil discourse, exacerbating the problem.

This campus groupthink means that important philosophical questions have become taboo. Students and professors can no longer have honest debates about questions such as, “Are humans a blank slate?” or “Does ‘human nature’ exist?”

Many topics that are routinely brought up elsewhere in society—such as immigration, abortion, government financing, international trade, speech, sexual assault, affirmative action, gun policies—aren’t debated on campus.⁸

5. Yancey, G. (2011) *Compromising Scholarship: Religious and Political Bias in American Higher Education*. University of Baylor Press.

6. Duarte, J.L. et al, (2014) “Political Diversity Will Improve Social Psychological Science,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

7. Inbar, Y. and Lammers, J. (2012) “Political Diversity in Social and Personality Psychology,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

8. La Noue, G. (2019) *Silenced Stages: The Loss of Academic Freedom and Campus Policy Debates*. Carolina Academic Press.

This lack of viewpoint diversity affects student attitudes and student learning. Recent research from a Knight-Gallup survey highlight that the political climate on campuses stifles diverse viewpoints. Findings indicate:⁹

- *Most students believe that their campus climate deters free speech.*
- *Students worry about how faculty and peers will respond to their political speech.*
- *Self-censorship and fear of expressing opinions are prevalent on campus, especially among conservative students*
- *Students from across the political spectrum report hearing disparaging comments about conservatives.*
- *Students have little knowledge of free speech and First Amendment rights*
- *Students almost universally see free speech rights to be fragile on campuses.*

That a substantial proportion of respondents fear social sanction, ostracization, or impartial grading raises serious concerns about faculty behavior and the campus intellectual climate.

The survey also shows that some students have begun to embrace illiberal attitudes themselves:

- *Many students harbor divisive stereotypes about those with opposing viewpoints.*
- *A significant number of students approve of censorship of opposing viewpoints.*
- *A substantial minority of students refuse to engage with political opponents for any reason.*

9. Gallup, Inc. (2020) “The First Amendment on Campus 2020 Report: College Students’ Views of Free Expression.”

Such attitudes are divisive and destructive to the function of an institution of higher education. The political monoculture at universities is at least partially responsible for Americans' growing mistrust of higher education.¹⁰ According to the Pew Research Center, only half of Americans now believe that universities are having a positive effect on the way things are going in America.¹¹ This is not healthy for any democracy.

Universities must change. As recent history has shown, what happens on campuses, does not stay on campus. It spreads and affects society as a whole.¹² Viewpoint diversity is necessary to create a climate of truth-seeking and civil discourse—on campus as well as off.

Recommendations

Legislatures, university boards, and faculty governing committees can take steps to promote and protect viewpoint diversity at colleges and universities. (They should also take steps to protect freedom of expression, which will be outlined in the Martin Center's "Blueprint for Reform: Free Expression.")

10. Cofnas, N., Carl, N., & Woodley Of Menie, M. (2018). "Does activism in social science explain conservatives' distrust of scientists?" *The American Sociologist*, 49, 135–148.

11. Brown, A. (2018). "Most Americans say higher ed is heading in wrong direction, but partisans disagree on why." Pew Research Center.

12. Maitra, S. (2018). "How Academia's Unhealthy Obsession With Diversity Creates Social Unrest." *The Federalist*.

Universities should:

- Discontinue the use of diversity statements in employment, admission, and funding;¹³
- Host public policy debates and external speakers representing views from across the ideological spectrum;
- Create first year student orientation programs that include a robust defense of free speech, free expression, diversity of thought, and constructive dialogue;
- Encourage students to understand nuance, and repeatedly and publicly stress the need for students to voice their opinion, without fear or peer-pressure in classes;
- Adopt a statement of support for freedom of expression; modeled on the declarations by the University of Chicago and the University of Oxford;
- Affirm students' rights to fair and impartial evaluation of their academic performance;
- Conduct campus climate surveys to understand students' experiences and opinions concerning free speech and viewpoint diversity;¹⁴
- Encourage professors to include commitments to constructive dialogue and free expression on course syllabi;¹⁵
- Incorporate questions about classroom free expression issues into course evaluations.¹⁶

Model University Policies

[Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression](#)

[University of Oxford Statement on Freedom of Speech](#)

13. Perry, M.J. (2018). "All applicants for faculty positions at UCSD now required to submit a 'contribution to diversity statement.'" American Enterprise Institute.

14. Larson, J., McNeilly, M., and Ryan, T.J. (2020) "Free Expression and Constructive Dialogue at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill."

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

(Model University Policies, continued)

Colgate's Commitment to Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom

Brandeis Principles of Free Speech and Free Expression

University of Maryland Statement on Freedom of Expression

University of California Board of Regents Standing Order 101.1(d): "No political test shall ever be considered in the appointment and promotion of any faculty member or employee."

Policymakers should:

- Mandate that public colleges and universities report annually on 1) all actions taken by the institution to promote and ensure intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas and 2) any events or occurrences that impeded intellectual diversity and the free exchange of ideas;
- Ban discrimination against students and student organizations based on the content or viewpoint of their expressive activity;
- Protect ideological, political, and religious student organizations by allowing them to require that leaders or members of the organization affirm and adhere to the organization's sincerely held beliefs, comply with the organization's standards of conduct, or further the organization's mission or purpose, as defined by the organization;

- Mandate annual reporting of public college and university expenditures on student organizations and invited campus speakers. Ensure that colleges and universities are complying with Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System v. Southworth which states that universities must not use mandatory student fees to promote or silence any political perspectives;
- Mandate that the syllabi for public university courses be made public;
- Tie state funding of public universities to actions safeguarding viewpoint diversity, perhaps through performance funding mechanisms.

Model Legislation

[An Act to promote free speech and intellectual diversity at certain institutions of higher education](#), H.B. 1087, 2019 Reg. Sess. (S. Dakota, 2019)

[Denial of benefits to religious student group prohibited](#). Oh. Revised Code § 33-3345-023 (2011)

[Allocating Student Fees](#) (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education model policy)

For More Information

For supplemental data or additional research on this topic, please contact the Martin Center by phone or email. You can reach us at 919-828-1400 or info@jamesgmartin.center.

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About the Martin Center

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal is a private nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education policy. Our mission is to renew and fulfill the promise of higher education in North Carolina and across the country.

We advocate responsible governance, viewpoint diversity, academic quality, cost-effective education solutions, and innovative market-based reform. We do that by studying and reporting on critical issues in higher education and recommending policies that can create change—especially at the state and local level.

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