

# Protect the Free Exchange of Ideas on Campus

Faculty Free Speech Activist  
Toolkit

**FREE EXCHANGE**  
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# **Protect the Free Exchange of Ideas on Campus**

## **Free Speech Toolkit for Faculty**

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## **Background:**

### **What are opponents of the free exchange of ideas saying about higher education?**

Proponents of the so-called “intellectual diversity” bill, “academic bill of restrictions” and similar proposals claim that there is a tremendous problem with political bias in higher education. More specifically, they’ll claim that faculty are dominantly to the left of the political spectrum, that they only teach the “liberal” side of an issue or subject and that they either intimidate students into agreeing with them or give bad grades to students that disagree with them.

The proponents of these proposals will then argue that in light of the problem they’ve found, someone must stand up and protect the students from these out of control faculty members, and propose the “intellectual diversity” bill, “academic bill of rights” or a similar proposal as the means to protect students.

### **But, is there *REALLY* a problem with political bias in higher education?**

There certainly are major problems that students face in college, from paying for it to campus safety to figuring out what to do after college in the “real world,” but there’s simply no evidence that there’s a problem of political bias in higher education.

Certainly, there are studies that argue faculty are more likely to be a democrat than republican—but what does that have to do with their teaching? The quick answer—nothing. Do republicans and democrats teach Shakespeare, organic chemistry or the civil war differently? Are students so incapable, impressionable and immature that having a deep discussion of philosophy or current events, or even hearing the occasional joke, will “indoctrinate” them? Are professors really so irresponsible that they’re assigning failing grades to students that back a different presidential candidate than they do? Of course not.

In fact, having rich discussions, learning how to pick apart and how to respond to arguments, learning how to defend your position—are all valuable and necessary skills to learn. Moreover, students in higher education are quite capable adults, a tough group to “indoctrinate” even if you were trying. Finally, even in the rare cases where the rare professor does behave inappropriately, there are already policies and protections on campus for students—from grievance procedures to mechanisms to dispute an unfair grade.

Simply put, while students do face a lot of real problems, political bias in college is not one of them.

### **What is the “intellectual diversity” bill?**

Similar to David Horowitz’s “academic bill of rights,” is a template proposal that would restrict how faculty members are able to teach and create an atmosphere where universities feel they have to censor potentially controversial content in classrooms. Rather than responding to a real problem or helping students, as their language tries to suggest they will do, these proposals are an attempt by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) and their allies to stop discussions of views that don’t square with their political agenda.

Unfortunately, these proposals are being taken seriously in far too many places. Already, more than 28 states have considered adopting some version of these bills. Worse yet, the story of higher education the “intellectual diversity” bill’s backers are telling is covered in the media all the time—leading to a climate where more and more faculty are intimidated into self-censorship and more campuses feel they have to freeze out free speech on campus.

We’re working to make sure that doesn’t happen.

**Fighting back—Organizing to stop restrictive proposals on your campus:**

To stop this, we need to fight back with a creative and media savvy strategy that will expose these bills for what they are: a major threat to free speech and to their education. You can launch this on your campus:

Tactics to stop restrictions on your campus and in your state:

1. **Share your story with the media** — Don't let the opponents of a free exchange of ideas on campus be the only ones talking to the press. Send your campus and city papers Letters to the Editor about why real academic freedom is important to you. Get faculty members and student leaders on your campus to write Opinion Editorials to the paper as well. Share your personal concerns: talk about how this would affect you and your friends. Contact reporters who cover the issue to make sure they know that there's another side to this controversy, and an equally organized response. (*See the appendix for sample letters and op-eds.*)
2. **Get student leaders involved** — These proposals directly affect your students and what they're able to learn. They're paying a lot to get an education, and deserve one that actually teaches them to think and exposes them to new ideas. Ask student leaders (think student government members, campus organization leaders, student trustees) to write letters to the editor, pass student government resolutions, etc.
3. **Get your colleagues involved** – Ask colleagues to submit Opinion Editorials as well. Get them to sign onto the statement against these bills (*See the appendix for examples of each*).
4. **Get your faculty senate involved** — Your faculty senate is one of the most obvious mouthpieces for faculty at your school. Urge your campus leaders to pass resolutions opposing restrictions on education. (*See the appendix for a sample resolution.*)

## **Talking Points—so-called “Intellectual Diversity” Bills/Proposals**

### **Main message:**

The so-called “intellectual diversity” bill is a politically motivated attack on the free exchange of ideas on campus. Moreover, proponents of this bill are distracting us from the real problems in higher education--that fewer and fewer Americans lack access to get the education they need to succeed.

### **For real learning to happen, higher education needs to include a free exchange of ideas.**

Freedom and open debate are the core of what makes learning at a college campus possible. It's this freedom that sponsors new ideas, fosters debate, exposes students to frames and theories they have never encountered and challenges core beliefs. It's hard to imagine universities successfully challenging their students and their communities without the freedom to say, think and debate anything and everything.

The so-called “Intellectual Diversity” bill would stifle that freedom. It would force year in, year out scrutiny from politicians into what is being taught, and how it is being taught— a sure recipe for a climate where faculty members feel they have to favor “balance” and “sensitivity” over scholarship and real learning. It will force universities to restrict and regulate the views discussed in classrooms and the views of speakers. The best way to ensure a wide variety of opinions and ideas is to have classrooms and quads as free from restrictions as possible. Let the marketplace of ideas, not political correctness, rule the campus.

### **Instead of trying to restrict what students can learn, we should focus on the real issues that college student's face, like paying for an education**

Over the past ten years, college costs have skyrocketed. State governments have cut college budgets and federal grant aid is stagnant. As a result, more students and families are forced to take out larger loans to pay for education. Over the past decade, debt levels for graduating seniors with student loans more than doubled. Over the past ten years, college costs have skyrocketed. State governments have cut college budgets, causing tuition increases. Federal grant aid is stagnant. As a result, more students and more families are forced to take out larger loans to pay for the student's education. Over the past decade, debt levels for graduating seniors with student loans more than doubled. We may not agree on which problem is the most dire, but it's a sure bet that students would be better served by our leaders and campus administrators focusing on the real issues.

### **There is not a problem with political bias in higher education.**

Proponents of these proposals, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) and David Horowitz claim to be defending students from “indoctrination” and one-sided teaching, but present precious little evidence for their claims. Both have touted studies of voter registration and party identification but have yet to explain how this affects teaching. According to Horowitz, “We did this [voter registration study] not to establish a principle for balancing faculties or even because we believed that these categories provided a useful intellectual standard.”

Furthermore, in those cases where a professor does behave inappropriately, there are standards and a process for dealing with it already in place. Universities all have ways for students to dispute grades they feel are unfair and complain about the conduct of professors and all have protections to make sure that political views aren't considered in hiring and promotion.

### **The “intellectual diversity” bills are an attempt by anti-free speech advocates on the right to silence political debate on campus and advance their own political agenda.**

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), the main proponent of these restrictive proposals makes no attempt to hide their political agenda. According to T. Kenneth Cribb, president of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (parent organization to ACTA): "But we should add a major new component to our strategy: the conservative movement is now mature enough to sustain a counteroffensive on that last Leftist redoubt, the college campus... "

Likewise, other proponents of restrictions on the classroom like David Horowitz make no attempt to hide his political agenda – he wants to undermine “liberal” professors and students and replace them with his conservative ideology and political cronies. In his essay about the campus blacklist, Horowitz uses a personal story to justify the need for an Academic Bill of Restrictions. In 2003, prior to a Horowitz speaking engagement at Columbia University, a professor sent out an email encouraging some students to protest his appearance. An infuriated Horowitz demanded that the professor apologize and the university issue a statement deploring her actions, simply because this professor chose to speak out against the ideas and policies advocated by Horowitz.

## **Sample Letter to the Editor**

### **Sample LTE #1-general**

For faculty members to be able to teach students, to build the critical thinking and analytical skills they'll need in the real world, the key to learning is having a free exchange of ideas between students and faculty. That environment allows for the debate that sponsors new ideas, makes someone rationally consider other perspectives, learn how to dissect an argument and its evidence and that allows for intellectual growth to occur.

Sadly, the "intellectual diversity" bill currently being debated would stifle that free exchange of ideas, making it harder for us to teach the critical thinking skills graduates should have. Rather than trying to protect and help students, it's a politically motivated attempt to curb what we can learn on campus. Rather than promoting a free marketplace of ideas, these bills would reduce our education to little more than fact regurgitation.

Not only will this bill harm students' education, but also it grossly underestimates the capabilities of our students. Even if there were a few rogue faculty members improperly bringing their partisan political views into the classroom, our students are not empty vessels that will simply be "indoctrinated" by a campaign joke. They're capable adults and their professors are committed professionals. It's time to move on to the real problems student's face, like paying for their education.

## **Sample Faculty Member Op-Ed**

Education, real education requires a free exchange of ideas on campus. For colleges and universities to accomplish their mission, there needs to be dialogue and debate in the classroom, students and faculty sharing new and controversial ideas, proposing new ideas and investigating innovative theories. Students deserve a college education that challenges me and gives them the freedom to say, think and debate anything and everything. They also deserve to have XXXX focused on making sure they can afford college rather than restricting what they can learn in it.

That's why proposals like the so-called "intellectual diversity" bill—which would do nothing to promote a diversity of ideas and instead restrict education, are so damaging. Rather than engaging in the debate, proponents of this bill only want to hear what they preach – even in the classroom.

Not only would this proposal damage education, it also gives my students far less credit than they deserve. The notion that students can't think for themselves is insulting to the students in my university. Students are completely capable of learning from a variety of perspectives, and the notion that they should only learn what everyone already agrees with shortchanges their intellect and education.

Higher education exists not only to challenge students, but also to come up with innovative solutions. That's true in the medical colleges where students and faculty are investigating the causes and cures of disease, it's true in the economics departments where students and faculty are coming up with new understandings of how our economy can work better, and it's true in my department as well.

It's surprising that this proposal gets as much weight as it does. Though proponents claim that there is a widespread problem with students being indoctrinated or having their beliefs shot down, there is scant evidence that this problem goes beyond a few isolated incidents. In fact, a main proponent, David Horowitz has had to back away from a number of his claims. For example, last fall, at a hearing before a Pennsylvania State Assembly committee, Horowitz was forced to retract previous claims such as a story about a Penn State University biology professor who had supposedly shown the film *Fahrenheit 9/11* to a class of science students, admitting the incident never happened. He also backed away from a story about a student who was supposedly penalized with a lower grade because of his views on abortion, and admitted that other examples of "indoctrination" he cites are unsubstantiated or untrue.

That's not to say that there are no problems in higher education. Students' today face rising tuition, decreasing financial aid and an uncertain job market that makes the thought of taking out large student loans too terrifying for some to even apply. They're having a tough enough time getting an education, and proposals like this bill of restrictions distract us from the real issues they face.

The truth is that this proposal seeks to shut down opinions and ideas that its proponents are opposed to. Playing politics is one thing, but this is playing politics at the expense of our students. Instead of focusing on ways to restrict what they can learn, we should be discussing real issues they face, like paying for the education in the first place.

### **Sample Faculty Senate Resolution opposing so-called “Intellectual Diversity” Bill**

Whereas higher education should challenge students to think critically, debate and explore ideas they are not familiar with;

Whereas a free exchange of ideas between students and faculty is the key to learning on a college campus;

Whereas restrictions on what content is taught in the classroom, what subjects are open to debate and what ideas students can be exposed to would hamper education at [university x];

Whereas around the country there have been numerous politically motivated attempts to restrict the free exchange of ideas that is critical to education, often referred to as the so-called “intellectual diversity” bill;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Faculty Senate of [university x] opposes any future attempt to institute the so-called “intellectual diversity” bill;

Be it further resolved, that the Faculty Senate of [university x] opposes any future administrative or legislative attempts to place restrictions on what ideas and theories can be taught in our classrooms or to restrict open debate and discussion on campus;

Be it further resolved that the Faculty Senate of [university x] calls upon [administration] to maintain [university x] as an open marketplace of ideas where free expression is exercised and where diverse views are expressed and debate of those ideas is encouraged.

### **Sample Student Government Resolution opposing the so-called “intellectual diversity” bill**

Whereas higher education should challenge students to think critically, debate and explore ideas they are not familiar with;

Whereas a free exchange of ideas between students and faculty is the key to learning on a college campus;

Whereas restrictions on what content is taught in the classroom, what subjects are open to debate and what ideas we as students can be exposed to would hamper the education students receive at [university x];

Whereas around the country there have been numerous politically motivated attempts to restrict the free exchange of ideas that is critical to education, often referred to as the so-called “intellectual diversity” bill;

Whereas proponents of these proposals have not been able to show that there is a problem to solve;

Whereas students need elected officials and administrators to focus on issues that impact many students like XXXX;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Student Government Association of [university x] opposes any future attempt to institute the so-called “intellectual diversity” bill and similar proposals;

Be it further resolved that the Student Government Association of [university x] calls upon [administration] to maintain [university x] as an open marketplace of ideas where free expression is exercised and where diverse views are expressed and debate of those ideas is encouraged.



