



March 7, 2019

Statement on President Trump's Proposed Denial of Research Funds

President Trump's pledge to issue an executive order that would deny federal research funds to colleges and universities that do not "support free speech" is a dangerous solution to a largely nonexistent problem. American colleges and universities are far from perfect, but with few exceptions they welcome a greater diversity of viewpoints and opinions than just about any other institution in society. Even if the current political environment poses significant problems for free speech, the view that the free exchange of ideas no longer occurs on campuses is grossly exaggerated.

In May 2017, in response to efforts by state legislatures to enact legislation that aimed to regulate campus speech, the AAUP declared, "Given the important role of colleges and universities in debate, dissent, and the free exchange of ideas, the AAUP strongly supports freedom of expression on campus and the rights of faculty and students to invite speakers of their choosing. We oppose, however, any legislation that interferes with the institutional autonomy of colleges and universities by undermining the role of faculty, administration, and governing board in institutional decision-making and the role of students in the formulation and application of institutional policies affecting student affairs."

While the specific provisions of the promised executive order have not been revealed, like such legislation they are liable to interfere with institutional autonomy and governance in ways that is more likely to stifle than encourage free expression and diversity of opinion. There are and always will be individuals on campus and in society generally who wish to silence those with whom they disagree. But punitive and simplistic measures will only exacerbate the problems they may create.

American Association of University Professors
American Federation of Teachers
Association of American Colleges & Universities
Association of University Presses
Authors Guild
Defending Rights & Dissent Foundation
Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund

Freedom to Read Foundation
League of United Latin American Citizens Young Adult
Council 44016
National Coalition Against Censorship
National Council of Teachers of English
People for the American Way
UnKoch My Campus