

Cover Letter for The Reopening of the American Mind

29 August 2022

The seeds for the emergence of The Generals Redoubt (TGR) were planted in the summer of 2018 through an alumni letter writing campaign triggered by the report of the Commission on Institutional History and Community. This group was empaneled by President Dudley after the Charlottesville, VA protests during the fall of 2017. The Commission suggested 31 ideas for consideration.

During the fall of 2018, the Trustees accepted a few of them in the form of renaming building decisions. A critical announcement impacting free speech and the continued rewriting of University history was also announced then. That decision was to assure during University Community events held in Lee Chapel that Edward Valentine's sculpture - *Recumbent Lee* - and the entire sculpture chamber would be shielded from audience view. I received the reason for this action in a letter from President Dudley stating students would not be distracted from the program by the image and embedded legacy of a University namesake. This development was the tipping point that led to TGR's formal establishment several months later.

For nearly 4 years now, we believe this decision has interfered with the historic presence of Robert E. Lee's legacy in the life of the community. TGR feels this was a deliberate action meant to muzzle Lee's voice and the tradition of what his memory means to Washington and Lee's highly respected liberal arts college and legal education programs. Quite simply, we felt then and feel today that this action was and continues to signal to the University community and campus life the right to free speech that is a bedrock principle of American life and higher education. And it is an action the University seeks to make permanent by its announced plans to build an internal wall shielding both a public view of and access to the statue chamber, unless City of Lexington life safety codes deter its construction.

Closely allied with this was other messaging conveyed by President Dudley to alumni chapters around the country he visited upon taking up his new role. He referred often to his and the University's "embrace" of the Chicago Principles on Free Expression and its status as the "gold standard" in regard to free speech. This all appears well and good, in that the University is on the list as having endorsed these principles in December 2015. The main difficulty is that the screening off of the Valentine statue is a clear affront to that doctrine that is supposedly so strongly embraced. Other examples have been previously reported in these pages. They would include the failure to discipline a faculty member who tore down administration approved posters placed by a student supporting the retention of the University's name or the failure to discipline students who stole banners concerning the same issue. More information on The Chicago Principles and its endorsement community are available at: <https://www.thefire.org/chicago-statement-university-and-faculty-body-support/>

Free speech matters take on other colorations as well. Among these is a growing practice at many institutions of two practices. One is requiring applicants for faculty and administrative positions to document their bona fides in terms of their support for and prior practice of the new holy grail of the academy – obeisance to the gods of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Further, existing faculty and staff are now often subject to evaluation on their actual subservience to these ideological goals, in effect creating a culture of compelled speech. In public universities such action may quickly risk becoming a constitutional issue, while in private universities there is often a visible movement to set it aside. Such practices erect huge hurdles that put at risk not only free speech, but also sets aside the possibility for viewpoint diversity and academic freedom. We are hopeful such practices have not yet reached The Hill and begun to poison the University's administrative culture. But given the apparent emphasis that DEI has surpassed all other educational goals at the University, we suspect the temptation is strong, if not already quietly underway in practice.

For additional perspective on these issues, we have provided two significant documents. One is a recent pronouncement by the Academic Freedom Association (AFA) urging higher education institutions to desist from requiring “diversity statements” as conditions of both employment and promotion per the discussion immediately above. It would be worth your while to explore the reference statement link highlighted at the end of the article. The AFA article is attached below.

The other is an article, also found attached below, entitled *The Reopening of the American Mind*. It was written by Wenyuan Wu, Ph.D. who is the Executive Director of Californians for Equal Rights Foundation. It appeared recently in the James G. Martin Center’s weekly publication *Spotlight on Higher Education*. The article is about the birth in October 2021 of a new player in the free speech arena. It is known as the *Alumni for Free Speech Alliance*. You will learn that TGR was one of five alternative alumni groups that helped bring it to life. TGR has representation on its board of directors and officer corps. We agreed to participate, as we have observed in recent years a callous disregard for free speech matters in campus and student life and in the University’s disregard for constructive input from concerned alumni. We seek a restoration of the free speech culture that a large portion of our followers recall from their time spent at Washington and Lee as students, parents, employees and friends of the University. We welcome your comments being sent to rwooldridge@thegeneralsredoubt.us

Please donate to The Generals Redoubt to pay for professional research related to defending Lee Chapel as a National Historic Landmark, for future funding to educate students about the rich history and legacy of Robert E. Lee, and to help bring back diversity of thought. We need your help if we are to save Lee Chapel as a campus and national treasure. Thank you in advance for your support. Information on how to contribute is found at <https://www.thegeneralsredoubt.us/support>

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas P. Rideout ‘63

For The Generals Redoubt

The Reopening of the American Mind

The Alumni Free Speech Alliance proves that the fight is not over.

AUG 10, 2022 WENYUAN WO

In 1987, philosopher Allan Bloom published *The Closing of the American Mind*, a book critiquing higher education in America. As a self-described teacher “dedicated to liberal education,” Bloom offered a thoughtful account of illiberal cultural and ideological trends:

Civic education turned away from concentrating on the Founding to concentrating on openness based on history and social science. There was even a general tendency to debunk the Founding, to prove the beginnings were flawed in order to license a greater openness to the new. What began in Charles Beard’s Marxism and Carl Becker’s historicism became routine.

Over three decades later, moralistic assaults on the American political traditions of constitutional neutrality, rationalism, freedom, and equality under the law have not dissipated. Attacks on free speech have particularly intensified, manifesting as both “cancelation” of dissenting individuals and self-censorship.

Some would argue that Bloom’s “closing of the American mind” thesis is playing out in real time. Yet every action invites a counter-action.

Though examples of the phenomenon are too numerous to recount, one anecdote and two data points are worth mentioning here. Last September, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) [canceled](#) a guest science lecture by University of Chicago professor Dorian Abbot due to his support for merit-based college admissions. Even though Abbot had been expected to deliver a lecture on atmospheric and planetary sciences, his critics labeled his views on affirmative action “infuriating,” “inappropriate,” and “oppressive”—fatal ideological stains accentuated by Abbot’s being “white.”

Elsewhere, a 2021 survey of 37,000 college students by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), College Pulse, and Real Clear Education [found](#) that over 80 percent of students

engage in self-censorship at least some of the time, and 66 percent deem it acceptable to shout down a speaker. This represents a concerning upward trend against freedom of expression.

Some would argue that Bloom’s “closing of the American mind” thesis is playing out in real time. Yet every action invites a counter-action. Those who believe in the value of free speech are not just going to surrender this hard-fought principle and constitutional right. After the Abbot incident, a group of MIT alumni, faculty, students, and friends formed the [MIT Free Speech Alliance](#) (MFSA), a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization created to “promote and defend MIT’s cardinal values,” including free speech and expression, viewpoint diversity, academic freedom, and open scientific inquiry. As of May 16, 2022, the alliance had [804](#) public members.

MFSA joins the [Alumni Free Speech Alliance](#), a growing national network founded in October 2021 by alumni groups from Cornell University, Davidson College, Princeton University, the University of Virginia, and Washington & Lee University. Currently, the network has 13 groups (Table 1), with the Harvard Alumni for Free Speech as the newest addition.

Table 1: Members of the Alumni Free Speech Alliance

| Name | Website |
|--|---|
| MIT Free Speech Alliance | https://www.mitfreespeech.org/ |
| Cornell Free Speech Alliance | https://cornellfreespeech.com/ |
| Harvard Alumni for Free Speech | https://harvardalumniforfreespeech.com/ |
| Princetonians for Free Speech | https://princetoniansforfreespeech.com/ |
| The Jefferson Council (University of Virginia) | https://thejeffersoncouncil.com/ |
| Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse | https://dfidunite.org/ |
| Alumni/Alumnae Coalition for Lafayette | https://www.aclslafayette.org/ |
| The Generals Redoubt (Washington and Lee University) | https://www.thegeneralsredoubt.us/ |
| UNC Alumni Free Speech Alliance | https://www.uncafsa.org/ |
| The Spirit of VMI (Virginia Military Institute) | https://www.thespiritofvmi.org/ |
| Open Discourse Coalition (Bucknell University) | https://www.opendiscoursecoalition.org/ |
| Alumni for the Wofford Way | https://www.alumniwoffordway.com/ |
| Fight for Yale’s Future | https://fightforyale.com/ |

Members of this new enterprise are our modern-day freedom fighters of higher education, who subscribe to [the Chicago Principles](#), a set of values and commitments to free inquiry, debate, deliberation, and expression articulated by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago in 2014. 87 universities have [endorsed](#) the Chicago statement already.

Historically, freedom to express novel ideas or unpopular opinions, a hallmark of liberalism, has been respected in American academia and upheld against temptations to censure on both the left and the right. In 1932, the University of Chicago invited William Z. Foster, the Communist Party’s

presidential candidate, to address its audience in spite of loud criticisms. In 1969, Saul Alinsky, the New Left radical theorist and practitioner, delivered [a speech](#) on community organizing and race at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 2015, Walter Kimbrough, former president of the Philander Smith College, a historically black institution, [invited](#) conservative provocateur Ann Coulter to speak on the college's campus.

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A large part of the rationale for restricting controversial speech on campus in the present lies in a desire to protect students—from hate speech, speech “violence,” misinformation, and any feelings of discomfort, alienation, or marginalization. When the Harvard community debated an invitation to its alum Charles Murray, one member of the faculty [equated](#) free speech on campus with “the rights of white men and conservatives to disrespect, insult, bait, and degrade everyone else.” Others have [cited](#) the rising financial costs when universities and colleges host controversial speakers. UC Berkeley reportedly spent [\\$600,000](#) on security for Ben Shapiro, who was invited by the Berkeley College Republicans in 2017. Left unsaid is that Shapiro's price tag pales in comparison to the school's [\\$25 million annual budget](#) for “equity and inclusion.”

If American higher education continues its leftward lurch undeterred, and its leaders increasingly give in to the mob's woke fragility, the financial cost of platforming controversial speakers will only get higher. More young students will be incited to shout speakers down or even use violence to stop their compatriots from hearing politically incorrect ideas.

More importantly, colleges and universities will be doing young Americans a huge disservice by deciding *for* them which speeches are appropriate on campuses and filtering the variety of opinions available using subjective tools. President and CEO of FIRE Greg Lukianoff and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt offer an important retort in their book *The Coddling of the American Mind*:

The more we strive for perfect safety, the harder it is to venture out into the world and learn its lessons. Children are thus unprepared to deal with people who hold ideas inimical to the ones they have been taught. College and life beyond it are filled with different ideas; it's a mistake to shield students from such controversy. Instead, they should learn how to listen to and debate with new and uncomfortable ideas. The Alumni Free Speech Alliance is a necessary oasis of moral courage and practical guidance for students, faculty, and friends of higher education. The principle of free speech must not be made subservient to other higher-education “values” such as diversity, equity, and anti-racism. After all, the freedom to disagree or dissent is a vital ingredient of diversity, isn't it?

And let us also be reminded: Foregoing freedom of expression for the sake of safety and inclusion will undoubtedly trickle down to K-12 education and the general population, damaging our democracy and social cohesion. At a recent school board meeting at the Conejo Valley Unified School District in Southern California, several parents sternly disparaged their fellow attendees as “disgusting,” “racist,” “hateful,” and “transphobic.” What was the alleged crime? Parents spoke against the teaching of transgender ideology in the district’s lower grades. Intolerance grows where freedom to disagree wilts.

Wenyuan Wu holds a Ph.D. in international studies from the University of Miami and is the executive director of Californians for Equal Rights Foundation.

Academic Freedom Alliance

August 22, 2022 The Academic Freedom Alliance urges institutions of higher education to desist from demanding “diversity statements” as conditions of employment or promotion. The rapid and widespread dissemination of such statements has proceeded with far too little attentiveness to obvious threats to academic freedom. At the very least, institutions should pause any continued solicitation of diversity statements until there has been a thorough airing of their putative benefits, how they are assessed and used, what safeguards can protect against misuse, and what might constitute less dangerous alternatives.

The practice that prompts our concern is requiring that members or prospective members of faculties submit statements in which they are forced to detail ways in which they have advanced or plan to advance “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI). A school of engineering requires that all applications for faculty positions include “a statement of your experience with or knowledge of inclusion, diversity, equity, and belonging efforts and your plans for incorporating them into your teaching, research, mentoring, and service.” A school of medicine has proposed that faculty members “be required to show effort toward advancing DEI in at least one mission area for which they are evaluated by including a short narrative DEI summary in their personal statement and by listing DEI-related activities on their CVs.” A history department directs applicants to submit a diversity statement that “highlights an understanding of the role of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in a university setting. Please include examples from past experiences and reference plans to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in your teaching, research, and service.”

Requirements for diversity statements have spread quickly and will continue to do so absent a determined effort to persuade academia to reconsider a practice with conspicuously disturbing features.

Academics seeking employment or promotion will almost inescapably feel pressured to say things that accommodate the perceived ideological preferences of an institution demanding a diversity statement, notwithstanding the actual beliefs or commitments of those forced to speak. This scenario is inimical to fundamental values that should govern academic life. The demand for diversity statements enlists academics into a political movement, erasing the distinction between academic expertise and ideological conformity. It encourages cynicism and dishonesty. An industry of diversity statement “counselling” has already emerged--and could easily have been predicted. There are prevalent and reasonable suspicions that beneath the stated rationales for diversity statements lurk unstated motives that include providing a way to screen out candidates who express ambivalence about DEI programming.

The growing regime of DEI testing through forced pledges of conformity threatens to impose a suffocating orthodoxy, penalizing expressions of DEI skepticism though such skepticism exists across a wide ideological range that includes not only right-leaning scholars but left-leaning scholars as well. Fortunately, there are signs that increasing numbers of academics are becoming aware of the need to respond with candor and determination to procedures that might seem to be innocuous but that are detrimental to core values of higher education.

The Academic Freedom Alliance supports efforts to ensure that colleges and universities offer to all members of their communities – staff, students, and faculty – environments free of bigotry. We also support efforts by institutions of higher learning to do all that they can, consistent with their academic mission, to ensure that faculty members offer their services on an equitable basis. It is, however, our firm conviction that compelled diversity statements undermine the best of the intentions that propel DEI initiatives. It is one thing for schools to take action against wrongful discriminatory conduct; institutions are under a legal as well as moral and pedagogical obligation to do that. A very different and disturbing thing is monitoring beliefs by demanding pledges of allegiance to an array of policies that are often vague, frequently ambiguous, and invariably controversial.