

General Politics of Academic Freedom in the United States

Politics of Academic Freedom

The pluralistic nature of specifically Western democracies allows for academic freedom in theory, though due to such nature, in practice it can be abused. External factors including political parties, and corporations that have their own interests and agendas produce an immense encroachment on academic freedom because of the consequences of their interests. An example of this is that a large percentage of organizations fund research projects that can have a direct impact on careers of professors and other educational actors. Professors and individuals who conduct research that serve interests of funding organizations are given a priority over those people who choose areas of research outside of those such interests.

Statistics Concerning the Politics and Polarization Effects of Academic Freedom

- In the U.S, roughly a third of academics and PhD students who are conservatives have been threatened with disciplinary action
- 70% of conservative academics report a hostile departmental climate for their beliefs
- In the U.S, dismissing controversial scholars is more significantly supported by younger academics and PhD students compared to older academics, over 4 in 10 of U.S academics would not hire a Trump supporter
- Graduate students of both conservative and liberal values differ far more in their perceptions of whether their politics fit academia than they do on questions related to how well academia pays
- 7 in 10 conservative academics in the U.S answered they self-censor their teaching, research, or academic discussion due to it being against the progressive consensus for fear of losing their careers
- In the U.S 9% of Trump-Supporting academics say they would feel comfortable expressing political beliefs to a colleague

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Abstract

Academic freedom is essential to the foundation of any education especially within a Democratic society. Allowing for an environment and format for the exchange of ideas can create and develop the opinions of students, and even professors. In order for students to learn, all ideas must be understood, and more importantly, it allows for new ideas to develop. Academic censorship challenges the development of society and can infringe individuals' personal autonomy, although it is important to note that there is a line with freedom of speech in the classroom. Speech that derails from an educational purpose and is simply offensive should never be tolerated. There has to be a balance struck between the necessity of academic freedom and also professional accountability in order for education goals to be met. Although some freedom of speech should be suppressed, academic censorship in addition, should have its limits. This poster will examine the general strengths and weaknesses, and the controversial and political nature pertaining to academic freedom within the democratic United States.

Academic Freedom's Strengths:

Democracy entails that society embraces diversity and that all ideas are welcome. When academic freedom is limited extensively, it can revert the diversity aspect of living in a democratic society. By creating a student's incapacity to view different viewpoints, creates an intolerance towards them. There is a clear connection between censorship and lack of independent thought, those who silence others often do so because they are unable to reply with arguments and are overwhelmed by their own confirmation bias. It also creates an incapacity for students to confront different viewpoints and explains why the speech of others is so disturbing to them. Although there are offensive dialogues and issues that can be quite sensitive to students and faculty, within a solely educational purpose, it can provide an adequate environment for them to be discussed, because misunderstanding and ignorance has vastly more harmful consequences than complete comprehension. In addition, there is plenty of legal argument to which not allowing academic freedom in the classroom is a violation of the federal law, for example there is the case *Hardy v Jefferson Community College*(2001); in this case it ruled that offensive speech was within the right of a classroom setting due to the teacher adhering to an educational purpose and politically correct.

Academic Freedom Limitations:

The dialogues within a classroom setting are not boundless, they must pertain to course topics, and saying offensive language cannot only upset students, though disrupt the educational objectives the course is trying to provide. Supreme Court Case of *Bonnell v Lorenzo* in 2001 sets the precedence for this by how it ruled that the classroom speech was not germane to a legitimate purpose. This case demonstrated how a teacher used profane language with no educational purpose, and how academic freedom can be politically incorrect from a legal standpoint.

Overall, professors and students must have content that relates to educational goal of the class and course overall, one does not achieve the educational prerogative by essentially saying anything at any time.

