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## **AFA joins with FIRE and HxA to Call for Institutional Neutrality**

*The organizations sent an open letter following an increase in university  
political statements*

PRINCETON, NJ – The Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA) joined with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) and the Heterodox Academy (HxA) to send [an open letter](#) urging America’s colleges and universities to restore truth-seeking as the primary mission of higher education by adopting a policy of institutional neutrality on social and political issues.

“In recent years, colleges and universities have increasingly weighed in on social and political issues that do not concern core academic matters or institutional operations,” the organizations [wrote in their letter](#). “This has led our institutions of higher education to become politicized and has created an untenable situation whereby they are expected to weigh in on *all* social and political issues. Most critically, these stances risk establishing an orthodox view on campus, threatening the pursuit of knowledge for which higher education exists.”

The letter highlights the University of Chicago's [Kalven Report](#), crafted in 1967 in response to campus protests. The Kalven Report states that a policy of institutional neutrality is premised on the defining mission of the university: to pursue truth through "the discovery, improvement, and dissemination of knowledge." To accomplish this mission, "a university must sustain an extraordinary environment of freedom of inquiry and maintain an independence from political fashions, passions, and pressures."

Quotes from AFA leaders are available below, and more from FIRE and HxA leaders [here](#).

"By avoiding taking sides in political debates, institutions of higher learning can facilitate the free and diverse inquiry necessary for true education. Both faculty and students can thereby be assured that their individual efforts to seek the truth and express their opinions will be free of administrative pressure to affirm a particular viewpoint. A public pledge by the overseers of colleges and universities that their schools will take no stance on the controversies of the day will also go a long way to restoring public confidence in the integrity of higher education."

**- Lucas Morel, chair of the Academic Committee of the Academic Freedom Alliance.**

"By taking official stands that speak for the institution as a whole on public issues that do not directly affect academic matters or the operations of the establishment, university leaders assume that they have a monopoly on the truth. As recent times have shown, this posturing thwarts the critical reasoning and diversity of ideas that are indispensable to education and the pursuit of truth by making heretics of those who disagree with institutional orthodoxy, while exposing the institution to credible charges of intellectual bias." - **Donald Downs, member of the Academic Committee of the Academic Freedom Alliance.**

"Recent events have emphasized the importance of universities not putting a thumb on the scale in debates over social and political controversies. Universities should be diligent in protecting the right of all members of the campus community to engage in their own appropriate scholarly and expressive activities. There will often be pressure for the university to pick sides and amplify or suppress some voices, but it is the proper role of universities to provide opportunities for discussion and debate and to facilitate teaching and research and not to declare orthodoxies nor award victor's laurels to one side in those debates." - **Keith Whittington, founding chair of the Academic Freedom Alliance**

*The Academic Freedom Alliance is a diverse alliance of college and university faculty members who are dedicated to upholding the principles of academic freedom and professorial free speech. These principles are central to the mission of our institutions of higher education for the pursuit of truth and knowledge. The AFA is committed to defending universal principles of academic freedom and will come to the assistance of professors regardless of their individual views. As always, the AFA is not concerned with the substance or merits of a professor's ideas but with the principle that universities should be places that tolerate controversial ideas and allow free inquiry and debate, not public opinion or political pressure, to separate error from truth.*

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