Resolution Concerning Academic Freedom and Viewpoint Diversity

Whereas, Northwestern University declares in its Student Handbook that all students are "free to assemble, to demonstrate, to communicate, and to protest," recognizing that freedom requires order, discipline, and responsibility and further recognizing the right of all faculty and students to pursue their legitimate goals without interference";

Whereas, Northwestern further states that "students may invite and hear speakers of their choice on subjects of their choice, and approval will not be withheld by University officers for the purpose of censorship," that "students will be free from censorship in the publication and dissemination of their views," and that "a student is free . . . to engage in all campus activities, exercising the right of a citizen of the community, state, and nation";

Whereas, Northwestern claims to support "freedom of speech, freedom of inquiry, freedom of dissent, and freedom to demonstrate in a peaceful manner," and prohibits students from depriving "others of . . . participation in a University activity" or disrupting the "regularly scheduled activities of the University," including extracurricular activities;

Whereas, Northwestern has engaged in actions that violate its stated commitment to freedom of speech and freedom of dissent, including the censorship of a faculty-produced bioethics journal, where an article about oral sex sparked administrators' concern over the Feinberg School of Medicine's "brand";

Whereas, Palestinian activist Bassem Eid canceled a scheduled speech at Northwestern's Hillel in February of 2016, due to the presence of hecklers and a fear that he "could not present his views in a free and open way;"

Whereas, Northwestern states that it is "committed to fostering an environment of diversity and equal opportunity" and that it "provides resources to prevent discrimination [and] foster diversity;"

Whereas, Northwestern's strategic plan is composed of four main principles, or "pillars," which are intended to guide Northwestern towards achieving significant goals in these four areas;

Whereas, one of these four pillars, "Connect," is intended to "close the gap between intentions and outcomes to connect individuals from widely diverse backgrounds and life experiences to a truly inclusive community;"

Whereas, as part of the "Connect" pillar, Northwestern intends to "vitalize [the] community of faculty, staff, and students with diversity of race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, religion and geographic origin, political perspective and economic condition;"

Whereas, President Morton Schapiro recently wrote that Northwestern "is committed to being a welcoming and inclusive community for all, regardless of their beliefs";

Whereas, the benefits of diversity for organizations, including universities, have been studied by organizational behavior researchers for decades;

Whereas, researchers have found that diverse backgrounds and personalities increases performance, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, and forces members of a group to anticipate and better handle conflict when it arises;

Whereas, viewpoint diversity primarily, but not exclusively, refers to political and ideological diversity, as well as academic background, styles of research, and research fields;

Whereas, studies have found that a person's psychological and political beliefs change how they view facts or observations that "have a significant political and ideological valence";

Whereas, psychologists and other academics have cautioned that researchers' values can "shape what research is conducted and how that research is interpreted"—and thus lead to biased research findings;

Whereas, social scientists have argued that the credibility of their science relies on their ability and "self-critical efforts to monitor and minimize the influence of scientifically irrelevant values on inquiry";

Whereas, the presence of diverse viewpoints is absolutely essential for academia to uphold research ethics and counter unconscious biases in research;

Whereas, diverse viewpoints will foster creativity and innovation within academia, which is imperative for the development of new research hypotheses and methodology;

Whereas, viewpoint diversity and academic freedom have been threatened at universities throughout the country;

Whereas, in the past three years alone, two lawmakers in Wisconsin threatened to withhold funding from UW-Madison because they were offended by courses dealing with race and ethnicity, Tennessee passed a law prohibiting universities from using public funds for a "sex week" or to "promote the use of gender neutral pronouns", South Carolina lawmakers voted to cut funding to two colleges that assigned LGBT-themed books as required reading for freshmen, and a Michigan Senate subcommittee threatened to fine universities for "any instructional activity that encourages or discourages union organizing of employees";

Whereas, universities have rejected the formation of certain student groups because of their political beliefs or viewpoints, including Students for Justice in Palestine at Fordham University, an NAACP chapter at Catholic University, pro-life groups at Johns Hopkins and Gonzaga

University, an LGBT group at Hampton University, Christian groups at Princeton and Pace Universities, and finally, Turning Point USA at Northwestern;

Whereas, communities across America, including universities, are more ideologically segregated than they have been in the post-war period;

Whereas, viewpoint homogeneity has negative consequences beyond the university, as ideologically congruent communities tend to elect more extreme members of Congress, are more intolerant, and hold more extreme opinions themselves;

Whereas, the causes of social justice and free speech are not mutually exclusive nor radically opposed viewpoints;

Whereas, this is not a call for lessening academic rigor standards in the process of hiring and retaining faculty and staff, nor allowing scientifically inaccurate statements to be taught or Northwestern's Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy to be violated;

Whereas, the education of Northwestern students, inside and outside the classroom, is negatively impacted by censorship (of both faculty and students), viewpoint homogeneity, and biased or flawed research among faculty;

Be it resolved, that the Associated Student Government here assembled calls upon Northwestern University to allow speakers of all viewpoints, assuming they are invited by a student or university organization, conduct themselves in a lawful manner, and do not violate the university's policy on harassment, to speak on campus without the threat of disruption, and to enforce the policies set forth in the Student Handbook, should disruption occur;

Be it further resolved, that this body calls upon the Northwestern administration to allow and protect peaceful protests by members of the Northwestern community, assuming those protests adhere to the policies put forth in the Student Handbook;

Be it further resolved that this body calls upon the Northwestern administration to only restrict speech insofar as it is unlawful, discriminatory, harassing, or threatening, or invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests;

Be it further resolved, that this body calls upon Northwestern's administration to continue to expand organizational diversity statements and efforts to include viewpoint and intellectual diversity;

Be it further resolved, that this body calls upon the Northwestern administration to oppose the censorship or attempted censorship of faculty and students, as happened to Professor Alice Dreger;

Be it further resolved that this body calls upon the Northwestern administration to resist any attempts by local, state and federal governments to censor or suppress the freedom of speech of students, faculty, or administrators, provided that they do not purport to be speaking on behalf of the school;

Be it finally resolved, that this body calls upon Northwestern's administration, faculty, and student body, to embrace the discussion and study of uncomfortable or heterodox ideas.

Respectfully Submitted,

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