

THE CAMBRIDGE DECLARATION



The Cambridge Declaration was drafted by national First Amendment Coalition board members and representatives from the FAC Undergraduate Student Council. On April 11, 1994, it was presented and ratified at a national student conference on free speech at Harvard University, not as a political statement, but rather as a manifesto of beliefs and concerns regarding the present state of higher education in America. First Amendment Coalition chapter presidents nationwide are asking their student senates to demonstrate their support for the principles and concerns embodied in the Declaration. In November 1994, the Cornell University Student Assembly adopted six planks of the Cambridge Declaration and openly announced their support for First Amendment rights on campus.



AMERICAN COLLEGES AND

UNIVERSITIES are held in high regard throughout the world, but along with great expansion of opportunity for students during the past generation have come other conditions which have served more to undermine than enhance the pursuit of knowledge.

We call on university presidents and their staffs, administrators, and professors to reaffirm their commitment, in word and deed, to intellectual diversity, universal standards, and academic freedom by addressing the following issues:

- the calculated efforts of many university administrators and professors to promote ideological conformity, which discourages conscientious expression and curtails intellectual freedom;
- the widespread application of two sets of standards in both disciplinary and academic matters, one for those who are defined as members of a favored-status group and another for students lacking such membership;

- an ideologically motivated curriculum bias in many humanities and social science departments which denigrates the Western tradition and American institutions and discounts the need for objectivity and balanced treatment of the subject matter;
- a new orthodoxy that stifles debate on "sensitive" issues by
- replacing reasoned analysis and discussion with intimidation, coercion, and slanderous attacks on individuals expressing opinions contrary to those favored by the privileged.

WE STUDENTS, REPRESENTING
UNIVERSITIES FROM OREGON TO
FLORIDA, from Arizona to Maine, believe that
the university should be a place of free speech
and unrestricted intellectual inquiry. We
believe...

- that the defense of intellectual freedom is vital to the health of our democratic republic and to the future integrity of the university system;

- that the prior restraint by public universities of student literature, whether posters, banners, or newspapers, is unconstitutional and diminishes the creative spirit;
- that speech codes and broadly drawn codes of conduct, no matter how benevolent in purpose, are inimical to the life of the university, and that no matter how plausible their rationale, have the ultimate effect of repressing views that do not fit prevailing campus ideology;
- that students should have the freedom to think, write, and speak the truth as they see it, without fear of intimidation, coercion, the threat of mandatory "sensitivity" seminars, or any other form of official pressure;
- that as Gerald Gunther has suggested, the best cure for bad speech is "more speech, better speech" and, when necessary, "repudiation and contempt" ,
- that expression which crosses the line of criminality should not be protected, and therefore administrators should enact strict

penalties for students who engage in newspaper dumping, intimidation, or other coercive acts used to promote one idea or one ideology over another;

- that administrators and professors should actively encourage reasoned debate and discourage the use of intimidation, coercion, and slanderous or other ad hominem attacks on students for holding views deemed unpopular by favored groups on campus.

WE BELIEVE THAT THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ALL CULTURES to the emerging world civilization should be recognized and studied according to their intrinsic merit. We also believe...

- that although the Western tradition is not above criticism, a knowledge of it is fundamental to good citizenship and should be an important part of every student's college education;
- that students should be encouraged to take courses in Western Civilization, logic, and philosophy;

- that students should gain an understanding of their own political and literary culture and therefore should be encouraged to take courses in American history, American government, American literature, and in traditions that have contributed most to these;
- that while we believe that study of non-Western cultures is important, "multicultural" programs as they exist in many universities today often promote a misconception of the Western tradition as elitist and exploitative;
- that these multicultural programs, by focusing on the actions of some leaders and practices which at times have resulted in colonialism and imperialism, have depreciated great Western principles of human liberty, such as freedom of speech, limited government, division of powers, and private property.

WE BELIEVE WORKS SHOULD BE INCLUDED in curricula on the basis of their intellectual merit, according to generally

acceptable standards of scholarship, and not according to whether they promote a particular political, ethnic, gender, or sexual perspective. We believe...

- that works which have been marginalized in the past due to racial or ethnic bias should be added to the canon if they meet the generally acceptable requirements applied to all other works;
- that individuals and their scholarship should be judged on intrinsic merits and not on conformity to "correct" political, social, or moral views, much less on contingencies of birth or membership in specially recognized groups;
- that all professors, particularly in the humanities and social science departments, should approach their subject matter and pursue their professional task of teaching and nourishing intellectual development, not by making issues of gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality primary factors, but, as much as possible, on an objective and non-ideological approach to knowledge;

- that professors must not engage in grade reprisal when students' work does not reflect the particular ideological position(s) favored by the instructor or department and should be disciplined if they do so;
- that double standards in both academic and disciplinary matters, the failure of administrators and professors to hold all students to a single standard of civility and academic performance, increases tensions between groups and resentment toward those whom the policies are especially desired to protect;
- that a person's intellectual competence is not related to his or her race or gender. We are therefore against university policies that judge students and faculty members according to their gender or skin pigmentation rather than the content of their characters.

WE BELIEVE THAT MANDATING SEMINARS on complex social and moral issues,

designed to inculcate contested beliefs, is inconsistent with respect for intellectual integrity. We believe...

- that such seminars, presented in the name of sensitivity and respect for diversity, serve in fact to discourage rational debate and discussion;
- that using official authority to attribute moral legitimacy to one position or another on complex social issues (issues which are being hotly contested in society as a whole) constitutes indoctrination and has no place in the high ground of academia;
- that "sensitivity" or "diversity" seminars should be replaced by free and open discussion and debates in which all sides of complex social, moral, and political issues can be presented without official imprimatur for one view or another.

WE BELIEVE THAT, AS BENNO SCHMIDT HAS SAID, "The university has a fundamental mission, which is to search for the truth," and that it should be a place where people

have "the right to speak the unspeakable and think the unthinkable and challenge the unchallengeable." We believe...

- that in order to maintain the intellectual integrity of the university, those in leadership positions, whether serving as regents or university presidents, provosts or deans, department chairs or professors, instructors or graduate assistants, must reaffirm their commitment to free and open discussion, a high level of discourse, and self-restraint in dealing with divisive moral and ideological issues;
- that public university administrators in particular, as agents of the state, must eschew an in loco parentis responsibility to instill moral doctrine or ideology in students. Indeed, they should be content with enforcing a single standard of civility, without undermining the principles set forth by the First Amendment.

AND FINALLY, WE URGE LEADERS OF INSTITUTIONS of higher learning to be

courageous and resolute and face these issues squarely. We urge them to reaffirm their commitment, in word and deed, to intellectual diversity, universal standards, and academic freedom. At stake is the preservation of our heritage of First Amendment freedoms into the 21st century.

