

Sense of the Faculty Resolution: Endorsement of American Association of Colleges and Universities Open Letter

Unprecedented federal intervention into higher education and into inquiry in general threatens the academic freedom essential for the economic, material, and intellectual integrity of our nation, and has dire consequences even beyond our border. This comprises an ideological assault mounted on many fronts that, even lacking a specific impact at any one institution, has led to a climate of chaos and uncertainty that undermines and constricts ongoing work in research and education.

The open letter published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U; see below) addresses this crisis and makes a clear case for the importance of academic freedom and the perils of government coercion into the free pursuit of teaching and scholarship. This letter amounts to a moderate statement that at its core calls for constructive engagement, not claiming that all universities are perfect, and leaving open a role for government oversight. Currently (1 May 2025) 594 institutions have signed onto this letter, and many of them are the peers by which Lehigh benchmarks itself and with whom we compete for students.

This statement is important not only for its content but for what it represents: a banding-together of peers that collectively can have more impact than when acting alone or responding only when threatened. While some may suggest that endorsing this letter is not necessary and that our focus should instead be on specific actions designed to protect our institution, we believe that casting the decision in these terms is flawed: it is not only possible to do both, it is critically important to do so.

Moreover, whatever specific threats might arise to research funding or visa status or endowments, it is crucial that the Lehigh community feel passionately supported in its core mission “to advance learning through the integration of teaching, research, and service to others.” It is essential that we make the case—repeatedly, and wholeheartedly—that academic freedom is foundational to this mission. Defending our institution means defending its people: past, present and future students, parents, faculty, staff, and alumni. Lehigh’s community needs to hear this.

In support of the Lehigh community, as well as our colleagues across the nation, the Lehigh faculty senate:

- Strongly endorses the AAC&U letter
- Calls for ongoing and transparent discussions about how the university will actively defend its core mission for all groups on campus
- Pledges to defend, using the tools at our disposal, the important principles of freedom of inquiry and education, and the inclusion of all groups in participating in this essential mission

This sense of the faculty resolution was approved by the Lehigh University Faculty Senate on May 2, 2025.

Peter Zeitler, Senate Chair

[A Call for Constructive Engagement](#)

April 22, 2025

As leaders of America's colleges, universities, and scholarly societies, we speak with one voice against the unprecedented government overreach and political interference now endangering American higher education. We are open to constructive reform and do not oppose legitimate government oversight. However, we must oppose undue government intrusion in the lives of those who learn, live, and work on our campuses. We will always seek effective and fair financial practices, but we must reject the coercive use of public research funding.

America's system of higher learning is as varied as the goals and dreams of the students it serves. It includes research universities and community colleges; comprehensive universities and liberal arts colleges; public institutions and private ones; freestanding and multi-site campuses. Some institutions are designed for all students, and others are dedicated to serving particular groups. Yet, American institutions of higher learning have in common the essential freedom to determine, on academic grounds, whom to admit and what is taught, how, and by whom. Our colleges and universities share a commitment to serve as centers of open inquiry where, in their pursuit of truth, faculty, students, and staff are free to exchange ideas and opinions across a full range of viewpoints without fear of retribution, censorship, or deportation.

Because of these freedoms, American institutions of higher learning are essential to American prosperity and serve as productive partners with government in promoting the common good. Colleges and universities are engines of opportunity and mobility, anchor institutions that contribute to economic and cultural vitality regionally and in our local communities. They foster creativity and innovation, provide human resources to meet the fast-changing demands of our dynamic workforce, and are themselves major employers. They nurture the scholarly pursuits that ensure America's leadership in research, and many provide healthcare and other essential services. Most fundamentally, America's colleges and universities prepare an educated citizenry to sustain our democracy.

The price of abridging the defining freedoms of American higher education will be paid by our students and our society. On behalf of our current and future students, and all who work at and benefit from our institutions, we call for constructive engagement that improves our institutions and serves our republic.

American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)

^[1] <https://www.aacu.org/newsroom/a-call-for-constructive-engagement>