

Background

In the last several weeks, governmental bodies have defunded multiple institutions, including Columbia University, Harvard University, Princeton University, and the University of Pennsylvania while providing neither evidence nor due process.

Funding cuts to university-based STEM programs undermine basic research projects that are crucial for discovering healthcare and environmental treatments that save American lives, as well as for driving the technological and scientific innovations that fuel our economy. Slashing social science research support undermines programs devoted to understanding cooperation, prejudice, leadership, management, marriage, child-rearing and a host of other topics essential for improving society and productivity. Reducing support for the Humanities curtails artistic creativity and scholarship and initiatives that inspire both children and adults into meaningful engagement with the world around them.

Restoration of funding has been held out in exchange for government overreach into universities in ways that violate academic freedom and institutional self-governance. Executive Orders and Dear Colleague letters seek to censor speech and mandate programming at publicly funded universities. The government has deployed its Homeland Security Department ICE agents to baselessly revoke student visas in order to arrest and detain international students as punishment for exercising their First Amendment rights. So far, these events have happened in relative isolation, with little communication and coordinated response across affected or soon-to-be-affected institutions. This resolution seeks common ground across Kentucky institutions uniting in a common defense to collectively safeguard their shared values of academic freedom, free expression, democratic governance, civic responsibility, scientific discovery, and the pursuit of knowledge.

Resolution to Establish Mutual Academic Defense Compacts in Defense of Academic Freedom, Free Expression, Institutional Integrity, and the Research Enterprise

Whereas, escalating actions by governmental bodies threaten foundational principles of American higher education, including the autonomy of university governance, the integrity of scientific research, and the protection of the freedoms of inquiry, speech, and association;

Whereas political actors have targeted individual institutions with legal, financial, and political incursions designed to undermine their public mission, silence dissenting voices, and exert unlawful control over academic inquiry;

Whereas, governmental actors have signaled a willingness to censor curricula, restrict inquiry, target scholars and students, and carry out politically motivated detentions;

Whereas Kentucky's Colleges and Universities represent a longstanding tradition of academic collaboration, research excellence, and commitment to democratic values and shared governance;

Whereas, Bellarmine, Eastern, Morehead, Murray, Northern, Transylvania, UK, UofL, Pikeville, Cumberland and Western represent hundreds of thousands of faculty, students and staff members students [Bellarmine University, Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State University, Murray State University, Northern Kentucky University, Transylvania University, University of Kentucky, University of Louisville, University of Pikeville, University of the Cumberlands and Western Kentucky University represent hundreds of thousands of faculty, students and staff members];

Whereas institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky—public and private, large and small—share a longstanding commitment to academic freedom, democratic governance, civic responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge for the public good;

Whereas Kentucky is home to a diverse and nationally respected higher education ecosystem that serves hundreds of thousands of students and employs tens of thousands of educators, researchers, and staff whose work supports innovation, critical inquiry, social mobility, and community engagement;

Whereas the preservation of one institution’s integrity is the concern of all, and an infringement against one institution shall be considered an infringement against all;

Be it resolved that, the Senates of the eleven Kentucky institutions with active chapters of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) urge the President and Provost of their Colleges and University to formally propose and help establish a KY College and University Mutual Academic Defense Compact (KYCUMADC) among all institutions that would like to participate;

Be it further resolved that, under these compacts, participating institutions shall commit meaningful support—financial, legal, organizational, and/or strategic—to a shared or distributed defense infrastructure designed to respond immediately and collectively to attacks by the governmental actors on any member institution;

Be it further resolved that, these compacts shall facilitate the mobilization of institutional resources—including legal counsel, governance experts, public affairs professionals, faculty governance leaders, research capacity, and media relations—to coordinate a unified and robust response, including but not limited to:

- Legal representation and, where appropriate, countersuit actions;
- Public communication strategies to counter misinformation and defend academic principles;
- Filing of amicus briefs, publication of expert testimony, and other legal interventions;
- Legislative advocacy and coordinated policy engagement at the state and federal levels;
- The development of collaborative strategies and frameworks to diversify funding streams beyond the federal government; and
- Rapid-response research and public-education initiatives;

Be it further resolved that, this resolution be transmitted to the leadership of all Colleges and Universities across the nation and all institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth of Kentucky as well as their shared governance bodies;

Be it further resolved that, the Presidents and Provosts of the KY Colleges and Universities take leading roles in convening summits of faculty and administration leaders to initiate the implementation of these Compacts and affirm the collective commitment to defend academic freedom, free expression, institutional autonomy, and the public mission of higher education in the Commonwealth.

Be it finally resolved that, the Presidents and Provosts of the KY Colleges and Universities also endorse the “Call for Constructive Engagement” offered by the American Association of Colleges and University (AACU), which expresses similar sentiments but fewer specific actions steps. <https://www.aacu.org/newsroom/a-call-for-constructive-engagement>,