



Free Speech Alumni Ambassador (FSAA) Program Executive Summary

Higher education is approaching an existential crisis. It is in danger of rejecting its most fundamental value, the search for truth, and replacing it with political dogma and opportunistic careerism. Other problems abound, but none so serious as this one.

In a well-run higher education system based on the honest pursuit of truth, the marketplace of ideas would permit critics to attack, refute, and even satirize such ideas. The worst theories would be prevented from gaining even a tiny foothold; the rest would be condemned to some musty little corner while more reasoned ideas displaced them. But that is not the case; the free market of ideas is broken, replaced by a one-sided, dogmatic consensus.

In much of the humanities and social sciences, political dogma has already replaced objective inquiry. In some schools of education, for example, science is considered dependent upon the background of the individual instead of having universal principles for all, with indigenous myths considered equal to rigorous research methods.

How Can This Be Happening In Plain Sight, Without Spurring A Massive Campaign For Reform?

It's been evident for some time now throughout America's public and private educational institutions, that academia no longer promotes a culture that inspires courageous collaborations, free speech, and free expression, allows people to peacefully exchange ideas and meaningfully engage with people who have differing views. Nor does it place telos (truth), logic, and critical thinking over ideological and social justice initiatives.

Two conditions are needed to effect large-scale reforms in academia to address these problems:

- A hierarchical, top- down system of governance that can enact sweeping changes.
- And for that system to be controlled or heavily influenced by those outside the system.

These are two of three objectives of the Free Speech Alumni Ambassador (FSAA) Program.

Bolstering the Board: Trustees and Alumni Are Academia's Best Hope for Reform

In congruence with the Free Speech & Peace Research Grant's goal of embracing differences, the FSAA Program's alumni ambassadors and their trustee constituents can lead the way towards new ideas and innovations that improve campus governance in regards to protecting freedom of speech and expression, reevaluating existing ideological orthodoxy, as well as enlightening academia, administrators, and students to alternate points of view throughout the marketplace of ideas.

Strong board governance provides immediate remedies for all these illiberal and irrational conditions. Most university boards, especially the public ones, were created by charters or statutes that placed the board fully in charge, and, remarkably, the boards legally retain much of their power. And yet, because of a variety of pressures and distortion, most boards have relinquished their rightful positions atop college and university governance.

Nonetheless, it may be that much of higher education is beyond reform. Having the will to reform is imperative; without that, nothing will drive change. Most elite private schools appear to have reached the point of no return. They are insulated from change by large endowments, tradition, and terminal groupthink; the politicization has metastasized, and only some unforeseen act of creative destruction will cause a reversal.

In such a scenario, the first place to look at the root of the problem is governance policies and practices. An examination of such practices reveals a system of "shared governance" that is guaranteed to prevent bold leadership at the top. Furthermore, shared governance and other academic cultural practices that give authority to mid-level individual employees and other bureaucrats prevent almost any attempt to right the ship of institutional state.

Reform Cannot Be Expected To Happen In A Broad-Based, Organic Fashion From Within

The incentives are such that those who see the need for reform put their careers in peril for speaking out. The psychological phenomenon known as "groupthink" is creating a dangerous uniformity in many departments and disciplines.

The reason is that the governance of academia has become almost terminally sclerotic and self-interested; academic leaders simply cannot, or will not, respond to these destructive trends. The results are appalling—but it doesn't have to be this way.

To help return governing to the board, the FSAA Program is intended to operate on two levels. One is to make the case for stronger board control. Such a hierarchical system, rather than the distributed shared governance system that exists now, is necessary to effect large-scale reform.

The FSAA Program also works on a more immediate, pragmatic level, providing proven solutions like adopting the Chicago Principles that can be implemented bilaterally to begin the process of reforming governance that effects freedom of speech and expression. In most situations, boards still have extensive legal authority, they merely need to exercise their existing authority, to put the brakes on many of academia's free speech suppression.

Educating Students About the Value of Free Expression, Open Inquiry, And Civil Discourse

Furthermore, as a third objective of the FSAA Program, there needs to be sustainable and ongoing undergraduate programming that models civil discourse, open inquiry, and educates students about the value of free expression. Indeed, in many departments on many campuses—the spirit of free and open inquiry is under attack.

Irrational theories, such as the belief that race and gender are mere social constructs, are proliferating. Political correctness and corporate and government money are distorting scientific exploration.

Many departments are dominated by adherents of fundamentally flawed philosophies, such as post-modernism or today's progressivism. Disturbed or hostile individuals are routinely hired, while conservative scholars "need not apply" to many departments.

On occasion, even political liberals who express moderate views in public are hounded out of their jobs.

All of this needs to stop before it is too late to enact much needed changes.