

## Public Statement

# A Call for Constructive Engagement

APRIL 22, 2025

*This statement was developed in collaboration with university and college presidents and other educational leaders across the country, after national meetings convened by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.*

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.

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- \ Andy Zink, President, Deep Springs College
- \ Mark Zupan, President, Alfred University

*We continue to accept signatures from current leaders of colleges, universities, and scholarly societies. Last updated at 2:00 p.m. ET on May 1, 2025. Currently, there are 592 signatures.*