



Remarks accepting
The Philip Merrill Award
for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education

Liberal Arts, Free Expression, and the Demosthenes-Feynman Trap

by Robert J. Zimmer

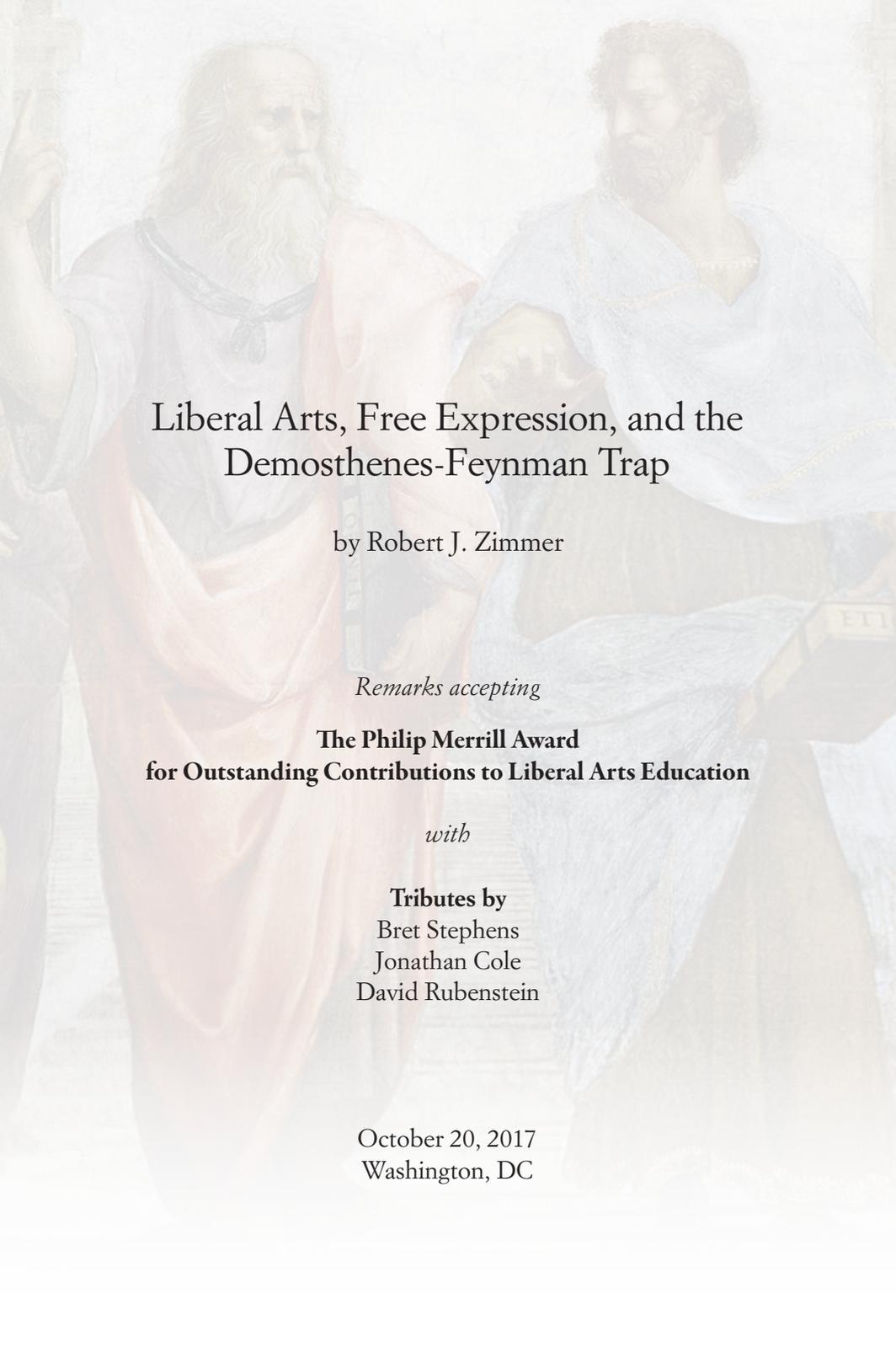
Tributes by Bret Stephens, Jonathan Cole, and David Rubenstein



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Bret Stephens

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October 20, 2017

Washington, DC

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Before turning to my formal remarks, I want to express my gratitude for being given the Merrill Award by ACTA. ACTA plays an important role in bringing attention to fundamental issues in higher education. There is a profound need for its demonstrated focus on the ideals of liberal arts education and what is necessary to deliver such an education. I congratulate those involved in their work, and express my appreciation for being recognized by ACTA with this award.

I also want to say a few words about Bret Stephens, Jonathan Cole, and David Rubenstein. These are truly extraordinary individuals, each with remarkable achievements. They have made great contributions to their own areas, and through that work, each in his own way has contributed deeply to the important issues that higher education confronts today. I am deeply honored to have such generous words said about me by individuals that I admire so much. I want to thank the three of you for all that you do and for your friendship.

Almost 2400 years ago, the great Athenian orator Demosthenes wrote: “The wish is parent to the thought, and that is why nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each person wishes, that they also believe to be true.” Demosthenes was not talking about deceiving ourselves on a personal level, but rather in our views of the world at large.

The phenomenon identified by Demosthenes has remained with us over the millennia. Speaking of science in the broadest possible sense, the great American physicist Richard Feynman said during his Caltech

commencement address in 1974: “The first principle is that you must not fool yourself—and you are the easiest person to fool.”

Both Demosthenes and Feynman use the same word—easy—to describe the tendency to self-deceit, and the word “easy” is important to emphasize. It is not just that fooling oneself is common, it is the easy and in that sense natural state of humankind. A physicist might describe this as the lowest energy state, which means that energy must be applied to be in a different situation. Moving beyond it will not happen automatically. Without effort, often purposeful effort, we are all caught in this Demosthenes-Feynman trap.

Liberal arts education, at its best, provides such an effort. Learning to recognize and challenge one’s own and others’ assumptions, the confrontation of new and different ideas, understanding the power and limitations of an argument, perceiving the importance of context, history, and culture, understanding the ubiquity of complexity, recognizing when to forgo the temptation of simplicity, grappling with exposure to unfamiliar modes of inquiry, synthesizing different perspectives, and being able to articulately and coherently advocate a position—all these are skills that students should acquire through their education and that faculty need to impart in delivering that education. Central to this education are free expression, open discourse, rigorous argument, diverse perspectives being brought forth by individuals with different backgrounds and experiences, freedom to express views that may be unpopular or contrary to any consensus, and the multiple intellectual challenges these activities generate. It is an education designed to teach students to think critically in multiple ways, and designed to impart a set of lifelong habits of mind and intellectual skills. These are indeed liberal arts, or in other words liberating skills, that enable us, at least to some extent, to free ourselves from the Demosthenes-Feynman trap of self-deception in thought.

One often hears liberal arts education described as being valuable for personal development while being dismissed as impractical. In fact, this is a traditional view of the liberal arts going back many centuries, and a

number of proponents of liberal arts education today are comfortable with this view. However, while the value for personal development is surely accurate, the assertion of impracticality is not. The habits of mind and intellectual skills of questioning and challenge that are gained from the demanding form of liberal arts education I have just described are a powerful and even necessary tool in many areas, particularly for leadership in an environment of complexity. Such leaders are inevitably faced with integrating different perspectives, understanding context and uncertainty, and questioning both power and limitations in a wide variety of arguments, approaches, and options. Getting out of the Demosthenes-Feynman trap is critical to being effective—leadership governed by self-deceit cannot be so. In this light, a high quality liberal arts education is in fact an excellent training ground for students who will soon be entering the world of work.

A concrete example is illuminating. Climate change is a question that is confronted in various ways by leaders around the world in government, business, science, technology, education, and non-profits. In order to understand this issue both seriously and broadly, here are some higher order questions that arise independent of one's viewpoint on climate change. What is the nature of scientific evidence and conclusion? How do you understand uncertainty? How does one think about risk? What forms of government are capable of making, executing, and sustaining what types of decisions? What type of trade-offs are different countries able or willing to make and why? How does technological change happen? How do societal culture and history affect market behavior, policy choices and outcomes? When can nations act collectively and when can they not? What approach can one take to analyze the impact of law and regulation?

These are the types of questions one learns to confront in a quality liberal arts education. They are all questions that many people, including some with strong views on climate change, will either never consider or respond to with unexamined and even unrecognized assumptions. Each question by itself does not give a full perspective on climate change, but

each is necessary to gain a sophisticated perspective on climate change. There are no “final” answers to any of these questions. Independent of particular conclusions or viewpoints, leaders needing to confront this issue will have limited likelihood of success if they remain in the Demosthenes-Feynman trap.

I have spoken of quality liberal arts education as both personally expanding and empowering in work. Yet, liberal arts education is under serious threat in the United States today. As we are all aware, there is a major assault on free expression and open discourse taking place on many campuses across the country. Many universities and colleges confront demands made by groups of students and some faculty that speakers with certain views (always views they disagree with) be prevented from speaking, and that universities adopt policies that limit the ideas faculty, students, and visitors should be allowed to present or hear. Others confront similar demands made by persons outside the university. As I have indicated, free expression, open discourse, rigorous argumentation, and freedom to express unpopular views lie at the very core of a liberal arts education. To diminish free expression is quite simply to diminish the quality of education. It is imperative for those of us responsible for high quality education to reaffirm this value and to resist these efforts to suppress speech. As we all recognize, the response of faculty and university leaders across the country has been uneven.

I am going to discuss three related but distinct aspects of the current threat to free expression.

First is what one might call the “no discomfort” argument. One of the persistent rationales for demands emanating from students and sometimes faculty to suppress speech is concern about discomfort. If students feel uncomfortable, this argument goes, there is something amiss and discourse needs to be controlled to correct it. Many of the persons who make this argument are of good will and are projecting empathy for those who might feel uncomfortable by the expression of certain views. Many students come out of a high school environment in

which this perspective is forcefully articulated, sometimes as one of the highest values of that educational environment.

One of the benefits of seeing education through the lens of the Demosthenes-Feynman trap is that it highlights how deeply misguided this argument is. Because education can help liberate us from the Demosthenes-Feynman trap, and because this trap is defined by an easy and comfortable state, it follows that an effective education is in fact intrinsically uncomfortable at times. Without discomfort and the challenge that stimulates it, there is no escape for thought being submerged by an ongoing state of self-deception. The argument for avoiding discomfort, therefore, is an argument against liberal arts education itself and against the empowerment that such education brings. Those who argue for avoiding discomfort, while seemingly seeking to aid students, are in fact doing all students a great disservice—they are advocating for reducing the quality of education, and along with it the capacity of students to apply critical and independent thought to the world.

One of the drivers for the prevalence of the no discomfort argument that we often hear today is exclusionary behavior. There is no question that there is a powerful history of exclusionary behavior in this society, as in all societies. Our history is replete with slavery, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and discrimination against religious and ethnic groups. Universities should all be striving to confront the continuing impact of these forces, and there is no question that creating an inclusive and respectful campus community requires serious and sustained work and attention. This effort is needed to ensure that all students feel sufficiently empowered to participate in the university's intellectual discourse. But part of that empowerment is helping students to accept the discomfort caused by conflicting views, and to see it as an intrinsic part of their own education and advancement. Automatically viewing discomfort caused by free expression and open discourse as problematic has the ironic

result of establishing a new type of exclusionary behavior—excluding students from the best and most challenging education that universities can provide.

Another feature of the “no discomfort” argument is an unfortunate and naïve neglect, and perhaps ignorance, of history. It is dangerous for a group with one particular perspective to advocate for special exceptions to a commitment to free and open expression. If universities allow some views to be suppressed, it is certain that other views, not always concordant views, will be suppressed over time. If those who were certain they were right were empowered to silence those whose views made them “uncomfortable,” we would never have had a civil rights, women’s rights, or gay rights movement on our campuses or in our nation.

A second aspect of the threat to free expression and the liberal arts education it supports is an attack on the very core of the university’s role in society, an attack seeking to turn universities into a political or moral battleground. While the “no discomfort” argument generally comes from within the university, this second threat, not benign in intent, comes from both within and outside the university.

Universities’ openness to divergent and clashing ideas, to analytic debate, to rigor, and to questioning, is a critical ingredient in illuminating societal, scientific, and humanistic issues. The greatest contributions universities can make to society over the long run are the ideas and discoveries of faculty and students that emanate from the intellectual ferment of such a challenging environment and the work of alumni across the scope of human endeavor empowered by their education. That universities are virtually unique in making this long-term contribution only highlights their importance to society.

The openness of universities, and therefore their most fundamental value to society, is under threat by those who view the university as a political or moral battleground and seek to impose their own views on others by suppressing speech, sometimes being willing to use disruption and even violence to do so. We have seen many such examples in recent

years. Such groups, independent of their particular views, claim moral superiority and act with an urgency driven by self-righteousness. The suppression of speech and open discourse by disruption or violence has been present with us through the millennia, and such conduct today only adds to this problematic history. One wonders when the logic of preventing someone from speaking and others from listening translates into preventing the library from having certain books. It is not that great a leap. We need to recognize very clearly, whether these groups come from within or outside the university and without regard to their political or moral view, that they stand fundamentally opposed to the foundations of what a university is, the nature of its societal contributions, and what an education should be.

A third aspect of the threat to free expression and liberal arts education is the role of university and college faculty and leaders. Each institution needs to decide what it is and what it stands for. Faculty, deans, provosts, and presidents, as well as trustees, individually and together, have a fundamental role in defining institutional values and how they are realized. Institutions may not all come to the same conclusion. But clarity about what an institution's values are and the expression of these values is important to each.

Many faculty and institutional leaders see themselves in a complex position with respect to free expression. They deal with complicated constituencies, multiple pressures and responsibilities, and competition for their time and attention. Many are now working on campuses in which free expression, even as an ideal, has been eroded. Some faculty and university leaders have strong political views themselves. The "no discomfort" argument, misguided as it is, can be seen by some as having a moral high ground based on the perception of empathy. Particularly in situations in which free expression is already eroded, a path to reversing the trend may not be straightforward.

We see here another potential Demosthenes-Feynman trap. Namely, will some university faculty and leaders think the erosion of free expression and the concomitant diminution of the quality of liberal arts

education are acceptable? Will they deceive themselves in thinking this erosion is not profoundly damaging either because they are sympathetic to a particular set of political views or because such an approach makes life easier for them in the short run? Are some university faculty and leaders caught in their own version of the Demosthenes-Feynman trap around this critical issue?

The saddest and most troubling development would be that faculty members and academic leaders, all of whom have the obligation to deliver outstanding education, become comfortable with the erosion of free expression, and relegate it to just one of the many things they deal with rather than supporting it as fundamental to education. To do so would be to fall into the very Demosthenes-Feynman trap that liberal arts education is designed to confront. This third aspect of the threat to free expression, namely that faculty and academic leaders may not escape the Demosthenes-Feynman trap of comfort with the erosion of free expression and of liberal arts education, may be the greatest long-term threat of all.

Let me conclude on a positive note. Just fifteen months ago, it was almost unheard of for open discussion of these issues to be taking place on most university and college campuses. The visible silence on the issue was itself a reflection of the erosion of free expression and open discourse. Within the past year, a number of university leaders and faculty have argued forcefully for the importance of free expression, and I for one am deeply appreciative of their actions. I am pleased that the Chicago Principles, reflecting the long-standing commitment of the University of Chicago, its faculty, and its leaders to free expression, have been a useful stimulus and tool in the emerging national discussion and have provided a model for a number of university faculty and leaders around the country to take a strong stand in support of free expression.

As educators, we have a collective obligation to give all our students the most enriching and empowering education we can. To this end,

supporting open discourse and free expression is not a task we can take lightly. We cannot view its erosion with comfort or complacency, and we should not deceive ourselves in thinking this erosion is not profoundly damaging. For the sake of today's students and those who will follow them, we must reaffirm our commitment to the spirit of the liberating skills, to the liberal arts, and to the free and open discourse and questioning that lie at their core.

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Tributes

The following are tributes given in honor of Robert Zimmer at the presentation of the Philip Merrill Award on October 20, 2017.

Bret Stephens

Columnist, New York Times

Good evening. I'm about to do something I have never done in my entire career as a journalist. I'm going to break an embargo. Fortunately, by the time this dinner lets out, the embargo will have lifted. I'd like to read a column that is going to appear tomorrow in the New York Times, and the headline is "America's Best University President."

Several years ago Robert Zimmer was asked by an audience in China why the University of Chicago was associated with so many winners of the Nobel Prize—90 in all, counting this month's win by the behavioral economist Richard Thaler. Zimmer, the university's president since 2006, answered that the key was a campus culture committed to "discourse, argument and lack of deference."

Reflecting on that exchange in March, Zimmer noted a depressing trend: While Chinese academics have made strides to "inject more argumentation and challenge into their education," their American peers are moving "in the opposite direction." As universities go, so ultimately go the fate of nations.

The University of Chicago has always been usefully out of step with its peers in higher education—it dropped out of the Big Ten Conference and takes perverse pride in its reputation as the place where fun goes to die. It was out of step again last year when Jay Ellison, the dean of students, sent a letter to incoming freshmen to let them know where the college stood in respect to the campus culture wars.

"Our commitment to academic freedom," he wrote, "means that we do not support so-called 'trigger warnings,' we do not cancel invited

speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual ‘safe spaces’ where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.”

The letter attracted national attention, with cheering from the right and caviling on the left. But its intellectual foundation had been laid earlier, with a 2015 report from a faculty committee, convened by Zimmer, on free expression. Central to the committee’s findings: the aim of education is to make people think, not spare them from discomfort.

“Concerns about civility and mutual respect,” the committee wrote, “can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.”

Those are fighting words at a time when professors live in fear of accidentally offending their own students and a governor needs to declare a countywide state of emergency so that white supremacist Richard Spencer can speak at the University of Florida. They are also necessary words. That isn’t because universities need to be the First Amendment’s most loyal guardians—in the case of private universities, the First Amendment generally doesn’t apply. They set their own rules.

Instead, it’s because free speech is what makes educational excellence possible. “It is the function of speech to free men from the bondage of irrational fears,” Louis Brandeis wrote 90 years ago in his famous concurrence in *Whitney v. California*.

It is also the function of free speech to allow people to say foolish things so that, through a process of questioning, challenge and revision, they may in time come to say smarter things.

If you can’t speak freely, you’ll quickly lose the ability to think clearly. Your ideas will be built on a pile of assumptions you’ve never examined for yourself and may thus be unable to defend from radical challenges. You will be unable to test an original thought for fear that it might be labeled an offensive one. You will succumb to a form of Orwellian double-think without even having the excuse of living in physical terror of doing otherwise.

That is the real crux of Zimmer's case for free speech: Not that it's necessary for democracy (strictly speaking, it isn't), but because it's our salvation from intellectual mediocrity and social ossification. In a speech in July, he addressed the notion that unfettered free speech could set back the cause of "inclusion" because it risked upsetting members of a community.

"Inclusion into what?" Zimmer wondered. "An inferior and less challenging education? One that fails to prepare students for the challenge of different ideas and the evaluation of their own assumptions? A world in which their feelings take precedence over other matters that need to be confronted?"

These are not earth-shattering questions. But they are the right ones, and they lay bare the extent to which the softer nostrums of higher ed today shortchange the intended beneficiaries.

They're also questions not enough university presidents are asking, at least not publicly and persistently. Instead, the prevailing conceit is that nothing is really amiss, that censorship concerns are overblown, that there are always creative ways to respect free speech while remaining sensitive to all sensitivities—a balancing act so exquisite that no student need ever be insulted, and no administrator need ever take a stand.

Zimmer knows what bunk this is; that if free speech—never a popular idea to start with—isn't actively defended, it will rapidly be eroded. For using the prestige of his office to make the case both brilliant and blunt, he has become the most essential voice in American academia today.

Jonathan Cole

Professor & Provost Emeritus, Columbia University

Thank you for the opportunity to join you this evening to honor President Robert Zimmer of the University of Chicago with the Philip Merrill Award. I can think of no president of a preeminent American research university who is more deserving of this recognition. If there were a Hall

of Fame for university presidents, Robert Zimmer would be a first ballot unanimous selection.

Coming from a background in math and science, Robert Zimmer has become a forceful defender of the critical reasoning skills and sensibilities that are intrinsic to a well-designed and implemented liberal education. Bob also has been one of the best champions of the liberal arts when speaking to youngsters who are inclined toward professional and business training.

I could dwell on these contributions alone, but this evening, I want to pay tribute to Bob as one of the great standard bearers of the core values of any distinguished university—those enabling values of academic freedom, free inquiry, and free expression that are so much a part of the University of Chicago culture, and which he has reinforced and extended during his tenure as its president. Without these values, a superb liberal arts education would not be possible.

The University of Chicago comes closer, I believe, than any other of the world's most distinguished universities to approximate, if not fully attain, a "meritocracy of ideas." It is a place where faculty and students have for over 100 years been able to generate debate on critically important subjects, where the participants are honored for their dramatically different points of views when they are well articulated and defended, and where intellectual combatants remain close friends. It is the quality of the argument that overshadows ideological commitments. This robust defense of free expression, open debate, and freedom of inquiry has been fostered at Chicago, in fact, since the days of its first president, William Rainey Harper.

Since Harper's leadership over 100 years ago, academic freedom and free inquiry have been periodically under attack in the United States, especially when it is coupled with more general societal anti-intellectualism. Too few academic leaders have used those assaults as teaching moments—a time to articulate why these freedoms are essential for any truly great institution of higher learning. The University of

Chicago has had a remarkable number of courageous presidents, from Robert Maynard Hutchins, George Beadle, Edward Levi, Hanna Gray, and now Robert Zimmer, who have reinforced the view that no one, including its president and provost, or trustees, speaks for the university. This view is designed, of course, to prevent a chilling effect on open debate, and is especially intended to defend minority views. A great university education, following Chicago's principles, is intended to be unsettling; its students must expect to confront ideas that question their own biases and presuppositions—ideas that they may even find opprobrious. And each of these academic leaders—true leaders—understood that path-breaking discoveries only emerge when there is an unwavering institutional commitment by the university to free inquiry. Given the threats and attacks from government sources, the instincts of some alumni, and the views of many faculty members and students, having academic leaders holding fast to these core values has been essential for maintaining the true mission of these institutions. In Bob Zimmer, we have the current exemplar of the courage that leaders need if our nation is to preserve its most productive educational institutions. The principles of which I speak have been codified in two University of Chicago documents of note—one, the now famous Kalven Committee Report of 1967, and more recently the Stone Committee Report of 2016, whose work was set in motion by Robert Zimmer.

Consider, in his own words, how Bob Zimmer has defended academic freedom and free expression on the university campus. Accepting that many universities might emphasize other values, Zimmer, in a 2016 essay said: “A feature of the University of Chicago's history is that it has been staunch in articulating . . . our highest values. We strive to preserve and enhance a culture in which openness can be embraced, although this is a constant challenge. Because of our history, culture, and adherence to these values, we inevitably find ourselves as a focal point on issues of academic freedom.” [Bilgrami and Cole, eds., 242]. At a Chicago Humanities Festival this year, Bob made abundantly clear that arguments heard these days to suppress speech on campus, “. . . lead to

the same place: a diminished education for all, and a failure to live up to our responsibilities as educators.” The position that Bob has taken has been contested, but true to the ethos of the University of Chicago and to his deep commitment to discourse and the growth of knowledge—for individual students and for the faculty—he has been vigilant and written and spoken with superb clarity about the rationale behind the culture of Chicago. With great intelligence, empathy, and awareness of alternative perspectives, and with the kind of quiet strength that is required if we are to continue to develop great university and societal leaders, Bob has provided guidance for other institutions of higher learning in the essential features of a university that at once permits the expression of radical ideas, but does so in an environment in which those ideas are subjected to conservative scrutiny when they make claims to fact and truth.

For the past few years, we have, surprisingly, seen assaults on academic freedom and free expression from students and faculty members who act to prevent invited speakers (whose views may be opprobrious to most on campus) from talking. We may even be witnessing an erosion of the sense on campus of the primacy of academic freedom. We have had calls for intellectually “safe space,” for trigger warnings about assigned readings that might offend some in class, and other forms of privileging knowledge—the current form of the “insider” argument that holds that only members of a specific group can understand that group’s experiences. Most leaders of universities have refused to engage these beliefs. Again, because of his intellectual strength, and personal beliefs, and because of his sense of the proper role of university leaders, Bob has not only engaged these views with his typical civility, but he has also persuasively argued for the spread of Chicago’s cultural DNA of academic freedom and free expression, as well as for the importance of a full liberal arts education.

Thank you Bob and those who have this evening celebrated this exceptional academic leader. I could not think of a more worthy recipient of tonight’s honor.

David Rubenstein

Co-Founder & Co-CEO, The Carlyle Group

Bob, it's rare you get to know what your own memorial service is going to be like. Speaking of memorials, I'd like to read a letter that was sent to me today on my I-Pad. It's from John D. Rockefeller.

Dear Bob,

I'm sorry that I cannot be with you tonight, but I am with you in spirit. Through modern communications, I'm able to send a message to you tonight and am pleased to do so. I've said many times that the best investment I've ever made was that which I made in supporting the creation of the University of Chicago.

But in truth, in recent years I was a bit worried about the status of my investment. I have been pleased, though, that under your leadership, the University of Chicago has regained its status as one of the world's finest universities. But that status comes not just from the number of Nobel Prizes won under your leadership. Rather, that status comes from your providing the kind of unparalleled leadership the University of Chicago once had under such leaders as William Rainey Harper, Robert Hutchins, Ed Levi, and Hanna Gray, among others. I can tell you from my recent conversations with these individuals that they fully agree with me, and former university presidents rarely say anything good about their successors.

I hope it will be many years before I actually get to talk with you in person and be able to convey in person my warm regards for the job you have done for the university I helped to create.

So in the meantime, let me just say that you have made me prouder of the University of Chicago than I've ever been. And you're not only a great leader, but in my words, in the jargon that I've learned here, you are a real *mensch*.

John D. Rockefeller

Now, I don't want to replicate what the previous speakers said about the First Amendment and other kinds of things that Bob has really stood for; he has done so much for free expression. Let me tell you about a couple other aspects of Bob that you may not know about. And I owe a lot to Bob, because I'm a graduate of the University of Chicago Law School and, as all of you know, when you mention where you went to school to people, they judge you right away about that. People ask you: Where are you from, what's your name, where'd you go to school. When you say I went to university A or B, they immediately say, "Well, you're very smart" or "You're not very smart." Now, when the rankings of the University of Chicago were lower than before Bob was around, people would say, "Where'd you go to school," I'd say the University of Chicago, and they'd say, "Well, okay, fine." But as Bob has done such a great job in moving the university upward, people—when I tell them where I went, they say, "Boy, you're really smart, you went to a great school." So Bob has elevated me in the eyes of my friends because now I can say I went to the University of Chicago, and they say, "Wow, that's a great school, one of the best schools in the world." So Bob, I want to thank you for that, among other things.

Let me tell you how he did this. When Bob took over in 2005, the University was a very good school. But to be truthful, it had slipped a lot in the rankings and in faculty recruitment and in recruiting good students. Let me tell you this: In 2005 when Bob took over—this is hard to believe—but more than forty percent of the students who applied as undergraduates to the University of Chicago got in. More than forty percent. Yet, the yield was less than a third; only a third chose to come. So, essentially, about half the people who applied to the University of Chicago got in, and only about a third of them came.

Since then, Bob has done many things to make the university so much more attractive: Today the university has an acceptance rate that is under about eight percent and a yield that's seventy-two percent—the highest the university has ever had. And that is an extraordinary accomplishment. And he has done that by also doing something else. He has doubled the

number of international students the university has. He has doubled the number of African American students the university has. And he has doubled the number of Hispanic and Latino students the university has. And he has dramatically increased financial aid to the university. And he has done all of this in ways which have now been widely recognized.

Of course, *U.S. News* rankings are not everything. My wife was the CFO of *U.S. News* when it started this process. When Bob took over, the university, for a lot of reasons, had slipped to around number nine or so in the university rankings of *U.S. News*. Today, under Bob's leadership, the university is number three, and that is really a testament to Bob's leadership.

Now, how did he do this? How does a mathematician do this? Really? Usually, mathematicians are not the people who are warm and fuzzy and who get great donors to show up. They are not the people who really know how to cajole people. They're looking at their numbers, and they really don't look up very much. So, how did Bob do this? Well, Bob did it because, unlike many mathematicians, Bob has a real soul to him. Yes, that is true. He realizes there are more things in life than just numbers. And he actually has the ability to do something that is very rare among university presidents. I am on a number of university boards and all have great presidents, but Bob has the important ability to be extremely smart but not to let the other people know how smart he is. And that is very important, because when you're wooing a donor, you don't want to let the donor know that you are ten times smarter than he or she might be. So Bob has been able to seduce a lot of donors to give enormous amounts of money to the university, because he is able to understand their concerns, to deal with their concerns.

Bob has also been able to do something else that people who raise money as university presidents aren't able to do very often. He can relate to undergraduates. The University of Chicago has twice as many graduate students as undergraduate students, and usually when that kind of situation exists, one might ignore the undergraduates. And that,

unfortunately, happened to some extent at the University of Chicago in, I'd say, the '70s, '80s, and '90s. The undergraduates were the stepchild of the university. The university was focused on its Nobel Prize winners, understandably so, graduate students, and professional schools. When Bob came in, he changed that dramatically. And now, the number of people who apply to the University of Chicago as undergraduates is about four times as high as when Bob came in. That is an unprecedented increase in such a short period.

Another indicia of Bob's success: Before Bob came in, nobody ever called me and asked me if I could help their child get into the University of Chicago. Nobody. I mean, I'm involved with a number of universities and I always get calls: Can you help my child get in? He's really deserving. She's really deserving, but she needs a little push. (I really cannot help, by the way.) Now I get dozens and dozens of calls every year: Can you help my child get into the University of Chicago? That never happened before, and that's because the undergraduate curriculum and the undergraduate experience at the University of Chicago is spectacular—in part, because Bob recognized that a great research university also needs to have a great undergraduate school.

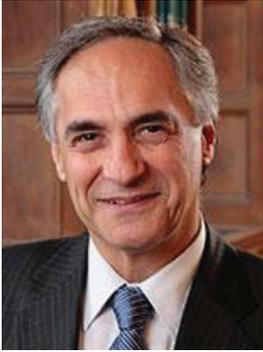
And Bob has made it to the point where people really want to go to the university, love it. Now, the saying, "This is where fun goes to die" (as was said in the 1970s) is not said anymore. The truth is the students there love it. And I am involved with some other universities, and they are very prestigious as well, but I have honestly never seen undergraduates as happy as I now see the undergraduates at the University of Chicago. And that is, in part, because Bob is not sitting in the ivory tower just dealing with Nobel Prize winners. He is talking to undergraduates. He's talking to faculty. He's doing the kind of things that a great university president really should do.

So, while Bob has gotten a lot of attention for what he's done to make certain that there's freedom of expression at the University of Chicago—more so than maybe any other major university—there are so many other

things that he's done that makes it deserving for him to have it be said of him—as our previous speaker did—that Bob is the finest university president in America. It is thus with great pride that I serve on the University of Chicago board and regard Bob as a great friend—not only because he's done a great job for the University of Chicago and a great job for the city of Chicago—but he has also done a great job for our country by making certain that we have a bastion of free speech and free expression in the heart of our country and by providing a role model of what other schools want to be. They want to be like the University of Chicago. And that's what John D. Rockefeller feels, and that's what I feel. And also I'm very proud that now when I talk to people and I say I went to the University of Chicago, they say: “Oh, you're really smart and that's the school that Bob Zimmer turned around. Congratulations for being a graduate of it.”

Thank you, Bob.

Robert J. Zimmer



Robert J. Zimmer, president of the University of Chicago, has led his university to become the nation's standard-bearer for academic freedom and excellence.

While at the helm of one of the world's premier research universities, he has been a prominent defender of free speech, demonstrating that greatness in teaching and research flourishes best when there is a robust and open exchange of ideas. President Zimmer contends that "the free expression of ideas is central to the University's fundamental commitment to rigorous inquiry at the highest levels." During his 11-year tenure as president, he has carefully and consistently drawn from the institutional history of his university to foster this exemplary culture of intellectual freedom. In 2014, he appointed the university's Committee on Freedom of Expression, which crafted the landmark Chicago Principles of Free Expression that have been adopted by colleges and universities across the country.

President Zimmer joined the Chicago faculty as an L.E. Dickson Instructor of Mathematics in 1977 after teaching for two years at the U.S. Naval Academy. Prior to assuming the presidency, he served Chicago as chairman of the Mathematics Department, deputy provost, and Vice President for Research and for Argonne National Laboratory. He also served as provost at Brown University from 2002 to 2006 and has held visiting positions at Harvard University and institutions in Israel, France, Australia, Switzerland, and Italy. He is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He has authored two books and over 80 mathematical research articles.

President Zimmer earned his A.B. from Brandeis University and his Ph.D. in mathematics from Harvard University.

The Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education



ACTA is most pleased to present the 13th annual Philip Merrill Award for Outstanding Contributions to Liberal Arts Education. The awarding of this prize, made under the guidance of a distinguished selection committee, advances ACTA's long-term goal to promote and encourage strong liberal arts education.

The Merrill Award offers a unique tribute to those dedicated to the transmission of the great ideas and central values of our civilization, and it is presented to inspire others and provide public acknowledgment of the value of their endeavors.

The prize is named in honor of the late Philip Merrill, a distinguished public servant, publisher, businessman, and philanthropist who served as a trustee of Cornell University, the University of Maryland College Park Foundation, the Aspen Institute, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

Throughout his career, Mr. Merrill was an outspoken proponent of academic excellence and an articulate spokesman for the importance of historical literacy in a free society. Mr. Merrill was a founding member of ACTA's National Council.



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