

American Council of Trustees and Alumni



CAMPUS FREE SPEECH

A GUIDE FOR GIVERS



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



FAR
FUND FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL

INTRODUCTION

Our democracy functions best when our citizenry engages in robust civil discourse, where people are free to share, question, contest, and debate all ideas to find solutions to our nation's most pressing problems. On some college campuses, however, all that remains of free speech is the lukewarm recitation of pre-approved ideas. The stifling of discourse undermines the purpose of a classroom as students are discouraged from the free examination of ideas. Students themselves recognize this growing danger, and alumni across generations share grave concerns about the state of civil dialogue and free speech in higher education.

What can alumni do to confront these challenges and help solve the free speech crisis? By practicing a strategy of targeted philanthropy, alumni can improve the campus climate without relying on college resources and while respecting academic freedom. This guide outlines three strategic approaches at various levels of cost to fostering free speech: classroom, campus, and policy, each with some potential costs and barriers. The following recommendations come from nearly 30 years working in higher education reform and from real gifts guided by the Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR), a free advising service for donors like you who want to make a lasting difference.

“You can have no wise laws nor free enforcement of wise laws unless there is free expression of the wisdom of the people—and, alas, their folly with it. But if there is freedom, folly will die of its own poison, and the wisdom will survive.”

—William Allen White

CLASSROOM APPROACH

A classroom approach focuses on cultivating a culture of free speech starting with professors and students. Professors have the power and opportunity to teach students respect for free expression and the skills of civil discourse, but they may not have all the tools to do so effectively. When done well, this training can have a multiplier effect as students carry the skills of civil disagreement to their other classes, their social activities, and their friendships. Several organizations offer faculty training programs, free of charge, including the College Debates and Discourse Alliance and the Constructive Dialogue Institute. Both of these organizations also offer frameworks for professors to hold classroom debates that emphasize viewpoint diversity and respectful disagreement.

Faculty are invaluable partners on campus for alumni who seek to make gifts with a curricular component because they design their own syllabi, bridge both the administration and the students, and tend to stay at the institution the longest. Yet, they are often underpaid and overworked—two problems that alumni can help resolve in the following ways.

Sponsor faculty to attend programs or conferences on free speech. Departments often have some travel funding available for attending conferences related to their work, but donors could supplement participation in civil dialogue programs. Typical stipends range from covering food and travel to simple amounts of \$1,500 to \$5,000. The amount can depend on how many faculty attend and where. Consider funding attendance at conferences like the biennial Heterodox Academy Conference that connect faculty concerned about free speech.

Sponsor a civil discourse training session on campus. Bring someone to campus to lead an in-person training on free expression, civil discourse, and related topics. Braver Angels offers free courses online that could be taken as a group. Alumni could also invite a member of Duke University's Civil Discourse Project to speak to faculty, offering to cover the cost of travel and/or a stipend. A faculty member with resources could organize a voluntary training, but campuswide events would require significant support from the administration or board of trustees.

Facilitate access to online trainings available through Braver Angels or the Constructive Dialogue Institute. These trainings are often offered free of charge, but you may need to incentivize faculty to complete them. Offer gift cards to those who participate (\$50-\$200), a raffle for a larger gift card (\$500), or provide lunch or dinner during the training. For online trainings, you could send an e-gift card upon proof of completion.

Fund a faculty fellowship. The Barnes Family Foundation took this approach at public universities in North Carolina. ACTA's College Debates and Discourse Alliance helped identify one faculty member per campus who publicizes and hosts at least one campus debate and one classroom debate each semester and receives a stipend of \$1,000 per semester. The foundation also funds event promotion, refreshments to encourage turnout, and two student fellows per campus who assist with the debates.

Encourage faculty to include debates and trainings in the classroom. The College Debates and Discourse Alliance, a partnership between ACTA, Braver Angels, and BridgeUSA, offers a curricular toolkit that walks faculty through holding parliamentary style debates in their classrooms. It also provides trained chairs to help facilitate debates if desired. Through these debates, students acquire the skills and knowledge pertaining to the class while also

developing the skills of civil disagreement and respect for multiple viewpoints. Debates do not have to be political to be instructive. For example, a literature professor could hold a debate on whether Shakespeare was one individual person. The Constructive Dialogue Institute offers *Perspectives*, a blended learning program that combines behavioral science with practical skills to help students engage in civil disagreement.

Fund seminars. Seminar-style classes allow for a more nuanced discussion of complicated ideas, and to give students the confidence to express their thoughts freely. While small class sizes can be unappealing to the university's budgeting officials, alumni can fund seminars that meet weekly or a few times a semester to help students ask difficult questions in a more intimate setting. The Liberty Fund works with teams of faculty to host seminars, or small conferences, to read and discuss primary sources in the topic areas of economics, education, fine arts, history, law, literature, science & technology, political theory, and theology & philosophy.



Faculty Training

Duke University Professor John Rose wrote about his experience in his classroom to fostering free speech in a *Wall Street Journal* article entitled, "How I Liberated My College Classroom." A donor read the article and helped fund Dr. Rose's work through Duke's Civil Discourse Project. With this funding, Dr. Rose started a summer training seminar on civil discourse for faculty across the political spectrum. The seminar helps faculty develop courses like Duke University's popular class, "How to Think in an Age of Political Polarization," and requires faculty to teach the course in the upcoming semesters. The summer seminar has limited spots and offers a generous stipend for attendees.

CAMPUS APPROACH

Through the campus approach, alumni work to build a free speech culture by making gifts that support extracurricular programming for the entire campus and potentially members of the public. At some institutions, this includes funding a new center dedicated to free speech or civil discourse. It is crucial to consider what programs or centers currently operate on campus, and to work collaboratively with faculty, often across departments, before introducing entirely new programs that require administrative support and faculty buy-in to succeed. If a center dedicated to free expression does not exist, look for potential partners on ACTA's Oases of Excellence network. Oases are faculty-led programs that are dedicated to rigorous instruction in the liberal arts and often emphasize free inquiry and

Life Skills

Engaging with people with whom you disagree is a life skill, but it is not always taught as such. This skill can be taught alongside other topics. For instance, a speaker series on preparing for adulthood could include teaching students budgeting, resume editing, civic engagement, and the tools for civil disagreement. The career office, writing center, or campus library often offer these kinds of trainings and might be willing to partner with a donor or organization to include a module on civil discourse.




intellectual diversity.

These programs could be open to co-sponsoring events, can connect you with concerned faculty, and engage students in both graduate and undergraduate programs.

Sponsor events on

campus. Alumni could work with the Campus Debates and Discourse Program and a faculty partner to sponsor student-led

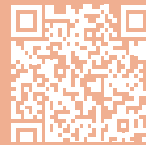


debates on campus. A speaker series can expose students, faculty, and members of the campus community to diverse perspectives. Donors can fund a speaker series as a one-time gift or endow a recurring lecture series. Be mindful of the kind of attention desired, whether you wish to make a splash or encourage debate, and consider speakers who will facilitate thoughtful discourse rather than instigate controversy for controversy's sake. You may need to negotiate how speakers are chosen as part of the gift agreement process.

ACTA's Oases of Excellence

These faculty-led centers on campus offer students a rich intellectual community and foster a spirit of academic inquiry.

Learn more about these programs by scanning the QR code below:



Promote the events. College campuses are one of the few walkable communities where A-frame signs and printed flyers are still effective ways to draw an audience to your event, but they cost money to produce. Donors can fund the design and print of these advertisements after finding on-campus partners. Ask faculty to share the event on department emails and in their classes, and ask whether they can help recruit the leaders of student organizations and clubs on campus. For more on student clubs, see Appendix A.

Incentivize attendance. There are several ways to increase student attendance at events. Faculty can offer extra credit to students who

attend. Never underestimate the appeal of free food. Pizza and salad rarely fail to attract students. Time the event for student convenience more than for the public. Holding the event during lunchtime or the early evening might incentivize students to attend. They may be less likely to come back to campus for an evening event after attending classes all day.

Communicate Your Values Through Philanthropy

John Altman, entrepreneur, longtime donor to Miami University, and the former chair of ACTA's Board of Directors, adjusted his foundation's bylaws to show potential grantees his commitment to the search for truth, freedom of speech, academic rigor, and accountability. To be eligible for funding, universities must adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression or a similarly strong commitment to free speech, meet a matching requirement and a high standard of academic excellence, and agree to an annual outside audit in perpetuity that ensures compliance. In 2019, Miami University became the 69th institution to adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression. Dr. Altman's bylaws reveal clear priorities, and his gifts to Miami University reflect a shared commitment to academic excellence and free speech with the university.

“No right was deemed by the fathers of the Government more sacred than the right of speech. It was in their eyes, as in the eyes of all thoughtful men, the great moral renovator of society and government. . . Liberty is meaningless where the right to utter one’s thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist.”

—Frederick Douglass

POLICY APPROACH

Changing an entire institution's approach to free speech is a monumental task, but campus culture can improve. Convincing the administration to adopt better policies requires making a strong case that the university is facing serious problems. It may take some research to discover the university's current policies and practices related to free expression. Check the college or university's free speech rating from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE). See how the institution measures up to ACTA's Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™. A quick Google search should reveal whether the university has faced recent controversies or even lawsuits concerning free speech.

Sponsor a student survey ACTA has partnered with College Pulse to conduct large student surveys on a number of campuses, and the cost runs approximately \$50,000–\$75,000 for a deep dive into demographic and political differences. We only recommend this strategy as part of a larger campaign. Survey data, also seen in FIRE's rankings of universities, is a powerful tool for convincing a skeptical administration that its campus is not immune to the self-censorship and free-speech issues plaguing other institutions. FIRE uses student surveys in its ratings of universities.

Give with strings attached. Offering a major gift contingent on the adoption of the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression or a similar institutional commitment to free speech is an appropriate request. It would be inappropriate to insist that all classes require a free speech component. Other options to consider might be a commitment to institutional neutrality or requiring free speech training in freshman orientation. If possible, make a multi-year commitment for any major gifts and request annual reports so that

the money only goes through if the university continues meeting the criteria of the gift.

Know how a college works. Universities are complex institutions and are resistant to change. Unlike a business, universities operate under a model of shared governance between the board of trustees, the administration, and the faculty. University trustees may be elected by other members of the board or appointed by the state government, or in some rare cases, by a public vote. They are responsible for the oversight of the institution's finances, as well as ensuring that the institution remains committed to its mission. The president reports to the board and oversees a large staff, including deans, chancellors, provosts, department chairs, and the faculty. Universities often have a faculty senate for academic decisions. They may also have a student government, which has minimal decision-making power but can be influential with the board of trustees and the administration. When trying to effect a policy change at an institution, bear in mind the complexity of the governance structure and expect delays.

Every campus comes with its own set of challenges. There is no one magic gift that will fix everything, but donors can make a difference, and your school is privileged to have alumni who care enough to give wisely.

Before making a direct gift, talk to an advisor like FAR that helps donors structure gifts to protect their intent and respect academic freedom. It is much better to prevent a violation of intent ahead of time than to try to rectify a gift that goes badly. You can reach FAR by emailing info@AcademicRenewal.org, or calling (202) 467-6787.

APPENDIX A:

Partnering with student clubs is an excellent way to involve the undergraduate population in free speech efforts, and some clubs are explicitly engaged in promoting civil discourse. Alumni can sponsor a booth at campuswide student club fairs or support the activities of a mission-aligned club on campus. Speaking with the club's campus leaders or the leaders of the nationwide organization the club represents should give you the best idea of how to help. Here are some potential clubs:

- BridgeUSA
- Debate clubs
- Fraternities, sororities, Phi Beta Theta, etc.
- Model UN
- Pre-law mock trial teams
- College Democrats
- College Republicans
- American Enterprise Institute Executive Council
- Intercollegiate Studies Institute

APPENDIX B:

There are many organizations doing the invaluable work of higher education reform. Some are broadly focused on higher education while others are focused on free speech specifically. Here are a few of the organizations you might consider supporting, in alphabetical order:

- Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA)
- Alumni Free Speech Alliance (AFSA) and their alumni chapters
- American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)
- Braver Angels
- BridgeUSA
- Constructive Dialogue Institute
- Foundation for Excellence in Higher Education
- Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE)
- Heterodox Academy (HxA)
- Speech First
- Liberty Fund

Worried about free speech at your alma mater? You are not alone. Alumni across generations share grave concerns about the state of civil dialogue and free speech in higher education. Yet, effecting real, lasting change is challenging. What proves successful at one institution may not necessarily work at another. Student attention is difficult to catch and even harder to keep. Resources are naturally limited, and gaining faculty and administrative buy-in takes time. Look inside for ideas on how your gift can effect positive change on campus for years to come.



Contact FAR to learn more about our services and to begin a conversation about planning your college gift.

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