

Dear Colleagues,

A February 2025 Faculty Senate survey revealed that at least half of the faculty who responded are "self-censoring" their instruction, that is, choosing not to teach particular topics or to have certain conversations with students. Based on these results, the Faculty Protections Working Group circulated a new survey to gather additional information about faculty experiences involving censorship of instruction, research, and extra-mural speech, and how existing protection mechanisms to address censorship and intimidation are succeeding or failing.

The results of this new survey paint a grim picture of academic freedom and free speech on campus: revealing a high degree of censorship and a significant gap in the support needed to empower faculty in their instruction, research, and extramural speech.

Almost half of the 738 faculty respondents report that they have felt pressure to censor teaching, and 226 have acted on it. Fears of the general climate, student retaliation, student evaluations, student classroom recordings, job security, and social media doxxing were identified as the primary sources of pressure. Based on the class sizes reported, censorship is impacting thousands of students, most typically through limiting conversation, discussion, and materials on topics related to DEI, U.S. politics, Middle East/Palestine/ Israel, gender, and race/ethnicity.

We encourage you to read through the responses to Question 8 (page 13 and pages 59 - 67) about the impact on student education, with many faculty expressing concern about the normalization of "neutrality," the abdication of the institution's responsibility to help students grapple with complicated, controversial, and nuanced ideas to make informed decisions, and the failure to teach critical thinking.

Twenty-seven percent of reporting faculty have felt pressure to censor their research and 17.1 percent (126 faculty) have acted on this. DEI, race/ethnicity, and gender lead the topics being restricted, though a large number of subjects (social justice, Middle East/Palestine/Israel, trans care, immigration, climate change) are being minimized, and faculty report grant terminations, the elimination of domains of research, and limited submissions to journals, among other impacts.

Pressure to censor extra-mural speech eclipsed teaching and research, with 48.3 percent of respondents feeling pressure, and 34.7 percent (254 faculty) acting on this. Faculty expertise and profiles in the public sphere are diminished, with 103 scholars reporting that they've closed or hidden social media accounts.

Within this landscape, 587 (80.4% of the faculty respondents) have never been directed towards university resources intended to protect them from threats or harassment. 562 (76.9%) have never reviewed resources on the Office of the Provost website. Faculty were most likely to seek support from a department chair or dean, though the majority of faculty who reported doing so indicated that the support received was unhelpful. Most of those who have referred to the provostial or ECRT resources describe them as not useful.

Faculty desire stronger communications from university leaders expressing support to teach/write about/research controversial topics and to assign poor grades when reflective of the work submitted, voicing explicit commitment to academic freedom, providing tangible support (such as paying for services that scrub information from the internet and providing legal support), and affording real consideration of the chilling effects of student classroom recordings, and accountability for bullying and harassment.

Faculty Protections Working Group

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