

Prominent Secular Universities Join the Fight Over Free Speech on Campuses

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As tolerance for free speech on America's college campuses continues to dwindle throughout the culture worldwide, a small group of colleges and universities in the U.S. has formed a coalition that is resisting the trend and fighting back. And the coalition it is growing with some recent elite university additions.

CBN News reported that the University of Oklahoma and the University of Texas have joined nearly 100 schools that have adopted the University of Chicago's free speech policy.

Eight years ago, the University of Chicago sent a letter to incoming students promising "they would not be protected against certain ideas, voices or beliefs, but rather the school would foster everyone's ability to engage in effective debate and deliberation."

Since 2014, the letter has become known as the Chicago Statement.

"The Chicago Statement also states unequivocally that students cannot 'obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views,'" University of Chicago alumni and legal scholar Jonathan Turley told CBN News.

The University of Chicago ranked this year as the top university by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) for allowing students, faculty and staff to express their viewpoints.

Turley said the Chicago Statement "has become the battle line

for not just free speech, but for the future of higher education. While many choose to ignore the rising orthodoxy on our campuses and lack of intellectual diversity on our faculties, this trend will ultimately destroy the essential element of free inquiry and expression needed for higher education.”

OU and UT, CBN reported, have recently adopted policies committing to free speech even if most students find that speech “offensive” or “immoral.” In essence, these new policies protect both sides of the equation—both liberals and conservatives, including Christians.

UT officials say they want to establish a set of principles that “pulls free expression out to the front and makes it a preeminent goal and focus of the institution, as it should be.”

“UChicago has forced schools and faculty to take sides in this existential fight over free speech,” Turley told CBN News.

Elon Musk, who recently purchased the social media mogul Twitter, said earlier this year, “A good sign as to whether there is free speech is someone you don’t like allowed to say something you don’t like. And if that is the case, we have free speech.”

Yet on college campuses, the limitation of free speech has become prevalent over the past few years. In July 2018, Michael Brown wrote that the University of Iowa and its officials banned a group called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, along with some other religious groups.

“This was because ICF had the audacity to require that its campus group leaders were Christians,” Brown wrote.

Another prime example of the limited free speech on campus came late last year when a tenured Canadian professor was fired from her job at Mount Royal University in Calgary,

Alberta, for criticizing Black Lives Matter, which she said “destroyed MRU to such an extent that she doesn’t recognize the institution” she taught at for 20 years.

The American Civil Liberties Union, once a beacon and advocate for free speech, has turned its policies completely around and now appears to be just “another left-wing interest group” that supports liberal views on campuses.

Another blatant example of the limitation of free speech came in 2014 on the campus of the University of California Santa Barbara. Professors at that institution supported a professor who physical assaulted pro-life advocates and tore down their pro-life display.

CBN News also reported that Washington University in St. Louis recently saw liberal students protest an on-campus speech by PragerU’s Amala Ekpunobi. The WU students “created a wall displacing the faces of dead transgender people and blamed Amala and the school for their deaths because the school agreed to host her.”

After a student newspaper rant by liberals, Ekpunobi responded on Twitter: “This is the sad state of higher education in America. Students who can’t handle their beliefs being challenged resort to spray-painted slander. This is the work of ideologues, not thinkers.” {eo}

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