



Interim President J. Larry Jameson, president@upenn.edu
Provost John L. Jackson, provost@upenn.edu
Faculty Senate, senate@pobox.upenn.edu
University Council, ucouncil@pobox.upenn.edu

September 3, 2024

RE: Institutional Statement Neutrality

Dear Interim President Jameson, Provost Jackson, Faculty Senate, and University Council,

On behalf of Heterodox Academy (HxA) we are writing to urge the adoption of an institutional neutrality policy for the University of Pennsylvania. HxA is the leading international, nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization for faculty, staff, and students who want to ensure that our universities are places where intellectual curiosity thrives. In pursuit of these principles, our [growing membership](#) of faculty and students spans primarily North America, including Penn's campus.

In recent years, as our world and our campus communities have grappled with challenging and contentious issues, there has been tremendous pressure on institutional leaders to issue statements of support, opposition, solidarity, or concern. But such statements may actually hinder the academic freedom of students and faculty and chill their speech by implying that there is a campus orthodoxy. As the University of Chicago [Kalven Report](#) astutely observed in 1967, when institutions of higher education are functioning properly, "[t]he instrument of dissent and criticism is the individual faculty member or the individual student. The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic."

With so much pressure on institutions to take sides, the very purpose of universities to be the home of fearless, open inquiry is at risk. However, there is a better way.

Adopting a policy of institutional statement neutrality—wherein a university or academic institution refrains from taking official positions on contested social, political, or moral issues that do not directly affect its core academic mission—prevents the institution from being seen as endorsing controversial ideological stances. This protects the freedom of

inquiry and expression within the academic community by ensuring all members of the Penn community can freely research, teach, and discuss all sides of an issue without fear of ostracization and repercussions from the university itself.

It is important to emphasize that **a proper institutional statement neutrality policy does not inhibit individual faculty, staff, or students from expressing their views on controversial issues**. Rather, it ensures that the university, as an institution, remains an impartial forum for diverse perspectives by removing pressure to conform, freeing students and scholars to speak openly and conduct research unfettered by a campus orthodoxy.

Just this week, [Cornell University](#) adopted a policy of institutional statement neutrality. Indeed, several Penn peer institutions or their faculty Senates, including [Harvard University](#), [Stanford University](#), [Columbia University](#), and [Vanderbilt University](#), have already adopted institutional neutrality policies, with more likely to follow.

You will find the [Heterodox Academy Model of Statement Neutrality](#) strikes the right balance between maintaining institutional neutrality and upholding the university's commitment to empathy and support for its community. We strongly urge you to consider adopting this policy and would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with you in further detail.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued leadership in making Penn a preeminent leader in higher education.

Respectfully,



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