



September 19, 2024

President Edward Montgomery; office-of-the-president@wmich.edu
Provost Julian Vasquez-Heilig; j.vasquezheilig@wmich.edu
Western Michigan University Board of Trustees; kahler.schuemann@wmich.edu

Sent via email

RE: Institutional Statement Neutrality

Dear President Montgomery, Provost Heilig and Trustees,

Last year you generously hosted me for a full day of campus activities to discuss the importance of campus free expression. Today, on behalf of Heterodox Academy (HxA), my colleague Raheem Williams and I, write to urge Western Michigan University to adopt a policy of institutional statement neutrality.

HxA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization of thousands of faculty, staff, and students advocating for policy and culture changes that ensure our universities are truth-seeking, knowledge-generating institutions grounded in open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement. In pursuit of these principles, our [growing membership](#) of faculty and students spans primarily North America, including Western Michigan's campus.

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 imply that there is a campus orthodoxy, chilling speech and inquiry. Recognizing the divisive and chilling impact these statements can have, we are urging institutions like yours to implement institutional statement neutrality on social and political issues unrelated to core academic matters or operations.

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.”

Adopting institutional statement neutrality will protect the freedom of inquiry and expression within the academic community by ensuring all members of the WMU community can freely research, teach, and discuss all sides of an issue without fear of ostracization and repercussions from the university itself. Several top institutions such as [Harvard University](#), [Stanford University](#), [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#), and [University of Virginia](#), have already [adopted institutional neutrality policies](#), with more likely to follow.

It is important to emphasize that **an 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.

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 a policy consistent with our model 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 WMU a preeminent leader in higher education.

Respectfully,



Joseph Cohn
Director of Policy
Cohn@heterodoxacademy.org



Raheem Williams
Policy Analyst
Williams@heterodoxacademy.org

cc: Keith Hahn, General Counsel; keith.hahn@wmich.edu
Professor Amy Naugle, Faculty Senate President; amy.naugle@wmich.edu