

Open Inquiry U

*Heterodox Academy Four-Point Agenda
for Reforming Colleges and Universities*



It's choosing time in higher education. In recent decades, colleges and universities have pursued an ever-widening range of activities and purposes. But society is now asking these institutions to choose. What is their basic purpose? Which of their aims is fundamental?

At Heterodox Academy, we believe the answer is clear. Colleges and universities' highest purpose is the communal pursuit of knowledge through rigorous inquiry, dialogue, and discovery. As faculty push the boundaries of existing understandings, and students wrestle with challenging questions and ideas, a college or university can cultivate a uniquely creative and disciplined environment that enriches the entire society around it.

But today, many colleges and universities have become uncertain about their core purpose—and it shows. As the pursuit of knowledge becomes one possible goal among many, the core practices and habits of truth-seeking have become weak, optional, or even taboo on many campuses. Too often, conformity is rewarded over curiosity, and dissent is met with suspicion rather than engagement.

We know that meaningful change must come from within. That's why, at HxA, we're equipping faculty, staff, and campus leaders to build a stronger academic culture—one that honors the ideals of scholarly integrity, pluralism, and free thought.

The recommendations below are practical and principled, and can be championed from any position within the institution. Whether you're changing a policy, launching a program, challenging a norm, or redesigning a course, there is a role for you in reforming higher education—one conversation, one decision, one campus at a time.

Commit to Open Inquiry

1

Enshrine knowledge-seeking as the college or university's non-negotiable purpose.

Establish open inquiry as the foundation for all institutional planning and decision-making.

Foster a culture of open inquiry across all campus domains.

A learning community is only as strong as its culture. Embed the principles of open inquiry in teaching, research, admissions, campus life, and governance.

Measure progress.

Regularly assess and report on changes in the state of open inquiry on campus.

Unleash the Free Exchange of Ideas

2

Adopt and uphold a campus-wide commitment to the free exchange of ideas.

Educate students, faculty, and staff about the principles that support free expression on campus, including the difference between speech and conduct. End policies—such as anonymous “bias” reporting—that chill discussion.

Practice institutional neutrality on contested public issues.

Refrain from taking official positions on topics unrelated to the university's core mission, in order to elevate the diverse voices of individual students and faculty.

Defend intellectual freedom.

Protect the scholarly rights of faculty in teaching, research, and public expression.

Insist on Viewpoint Diversity

3

Expand the range of perspectives on campus.

Broaden curricula, job postings, research agendas, and campus events. Welcome pluralism, and actively cultivate it.

Eliminate ideological litmus tests.

Search out and remove formal or implicit screens based on viewpoint in hiring, admissions, and evaluation.

Address systemic incentives toward conformity.

Reform systems and norms that promote self-censorship or discourage dissent.

Invest in Constructive Disagreement

4

Model scholarly virtues in all professional contexts.

Encourage curiosity, humility, evidence-based reasoning, and charitable engagement.

Make disagreement a core academic skill.

Incorporate structured disagreement into classrooms, research collaborations, and campus life—through co-teaching, public debates, and adversarial inquiry.

Explain the value of pluralism in the academic setting.

Educate students, faculty, and staff about the role of heterodox thinking in the expansion of human understanding—past, present, and future.



Developed by Heterodox Academy as a resource to foster a culture of open inquiry on college campuses.

Have questions?

Reach out to questions@heterodoxacademy.org

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