

“The university is the home and sponsor of critics; it is not itself the critic.”

# **The Rising Tide of Statement Neutrality in Higher Education:**

*How Universities Are Rethinking Institutional Speech*

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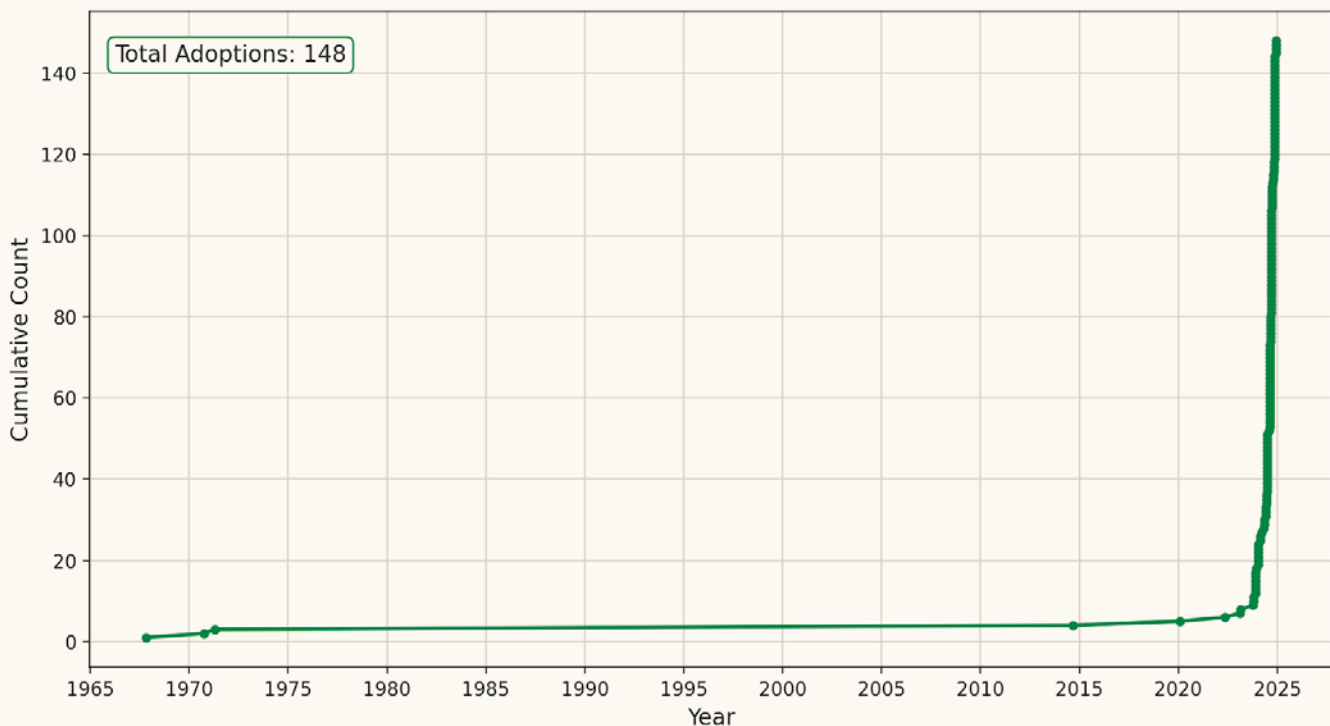


Figure 1. Cumulative adoptions of institutional statement neutrality, 1967-2024.

# The Rising Tide of Statement Neutrality in Higher Education

In 2024, North American universities and colleges dramatically shifted their approach to controversial social and political issues. **By the end of 2024, at least 148 institutions—serving a total of roughly 2.6 million students** (approximately 15% of the student population in the U.S. and Canada)—adopted policies whereby leaders refrain from using the institutional voice to weigh in on contested social and political issues that do not directly impact the institution’s core mission (see *Figure 1*). This marked exponential growth from the eight known institutions that had adopted such policies before late 2023.

The aftermath of the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel appeared to have placed pressure on

higher education institutions to address the sensitive and complex issues arising from the conflict. This pressure is illustrated by an *Inside Higher Ed* poll that found 21% of US college presidents reporting that campus speech policies were so stressed by on-campus reactions to world events, changes to their approach to taking stances on social and political events might be needed. Statement neutrality was originally pioneered by the University of Chicago from its founding and formalised in its 1967 Kalven Report. Building on this foundation, in February 2024, Heterodox Academy (HxA), the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), and the Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA) jointly called on colleges and universities to adopt institutional statement neutrality.



In this report, we analyze the wave of institutional statement neutrality adoptions from fall 2023 through the end of 2024, focusing on catalysts for adoption, what kinds of institutions are adopting such policies, how statement neutrality becomes a policy at institutions, and variations on the content of these policies. Our analysis shows:

- **148 institutions had adopted a version of institutional statement neutrality by December 31, 2024;**
- **97% of statement neutrality policies are justified by appeal to the values of community and inclusion;**
- **88% of statement neutrality policies are justified by appeal to considerations of free speech/academic freedom;**
- **78% of institutions adopting institutional statement neutrality policies are public colleges or universities, with R1 research intensive universities representing the largest proportion of these policy adoptions at 35%;**
- **72% of institutional statement neutrality policies mandate that institutional leaders refrain from stating institutional positions on social or political issues, unless the institution's mission is directly implicated;**
- **70% of policy adoptions involve action by governing boards, especially at public institutions of higher education. In some cases, such as in North Carolina, Indiana, and Utah, institutions are acting in direct response to state legislation.**

Without official institutional statement neutrality policies, universities and their leadership can find themselves incentivized or pressured to use their institutional voice to take stances on often

contested social and political events, from major geopolitical conflicts to domestic sociopolitical tensions. These issues are almost always outside the scope of the institution's mission. When universities and their leaders use their institutional voice to take stances on contentious social and political issues—often with a moralizing tone—they risk chilling viewpoint diversity and free expression on their campuses, the very places where open inquiry should thrive.

The unprecedented increase in institutional statement neutrality adoptions occurring on campuses across North America is a move that strengthens open inquiry and viewpoint diversity. In times of social or political controversy, colleges and universities have a unique chance to elevate public debate when they refrain from taking their own stances and instead empower the varied voices of their communities.





# Catalysts for Adoptions of Institutional Statement Neutrality

The growth of institutional statement neutrality policies is a striking story of rapid change in higher education. In the over 50 years since the University of Chicago's pioneering 1967 Kalven Report, only a handful of institutions embraced statement neutrality. Prior to the events of October 7, 2023, just eight universities and colleges had official policies in place.

This slow adoption rate began to change after October 7, 2023. As universities struggled to

respond to campus tensions following the Hamas attack on Israel, followed by spring protests erupting on campuses across the nation, many institutions began reconsidering their approach to institutional statements on controversial issues. Over the following months, the wave of adoptions began, with the number of institutions doubling by the end of the academic year in Spring 2024 (see *Figure 2*).

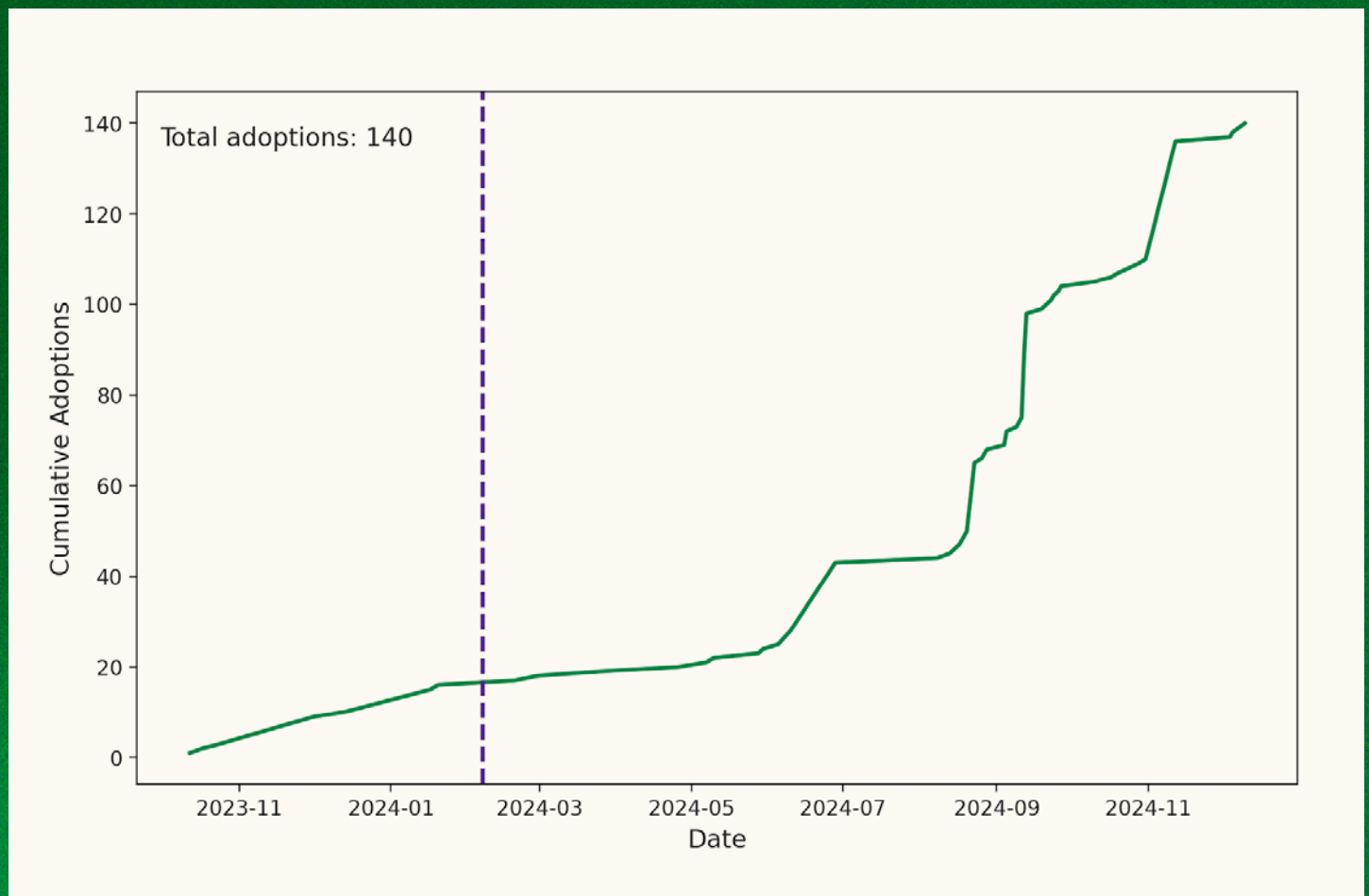


Figure 2. Cumulative adoptions of institutional neutrality after October 7, 2023.

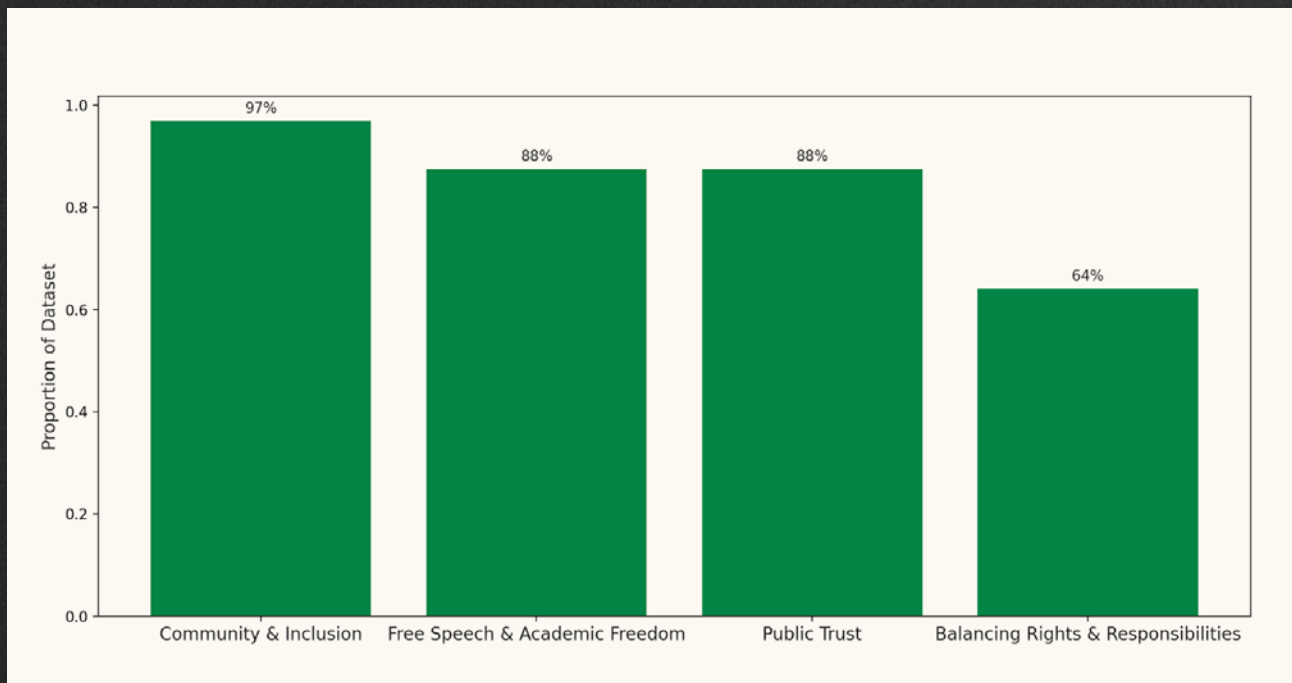


Figure 3. Cited reasons for adopting statement neutrality policies in official announcements.

On February 7, 2024 (indicated with the dashed purple line in Figure 2), Heterodox Academy (HxA) co-authored a [public letter](#) with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) and the Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA) calling on colleges and universities to adopt policies of statement neutrality and refrain from releasing statements about social and political issues that do not directly affect their core missions.

Then, as the 2024-25 academic year began, the flood gates opened. By the end of the fall semester, at least **148 colleges and universities had adopted a policy of institutional statement neutrality**, with 144 in the U.S. and four in Canada. (A list of institutions that have adopted institutional statement neutrality policies as of December 31, 2024 can be found in the Appendix.)

Each of these new institutional statement neutrality policies have come with some version of an announcement. In these announcements, universities or their leaders have consistently emphasized four core values (see Figure 3).

Almost all announcements—fully 97%—frame their statement neutrality policy as a way to create more inclusive campus environments where diverse viewpoints can coexist.

Freedom of expression values were mentioned in 88% of the statements, with emphasis on how statement neutrality supports rather than restricts free speech by preventing institutional positions from chilling individual expression.

Public trust—an [ongoing problem](#) for institutions of higher education in the last decade—is mentioned in 88% of announcements, citing their responsibility to serve all constituencies, particularly public universities serving taxpayers with diverse views.

Additionally, 64% of institutions specifically addressed the challenge of balancing individual rights with institutional responsibilities—acknowledging that, while statement neutrality might seem restrictive to some, it ultimately protects both institutional integrity and individual expression.



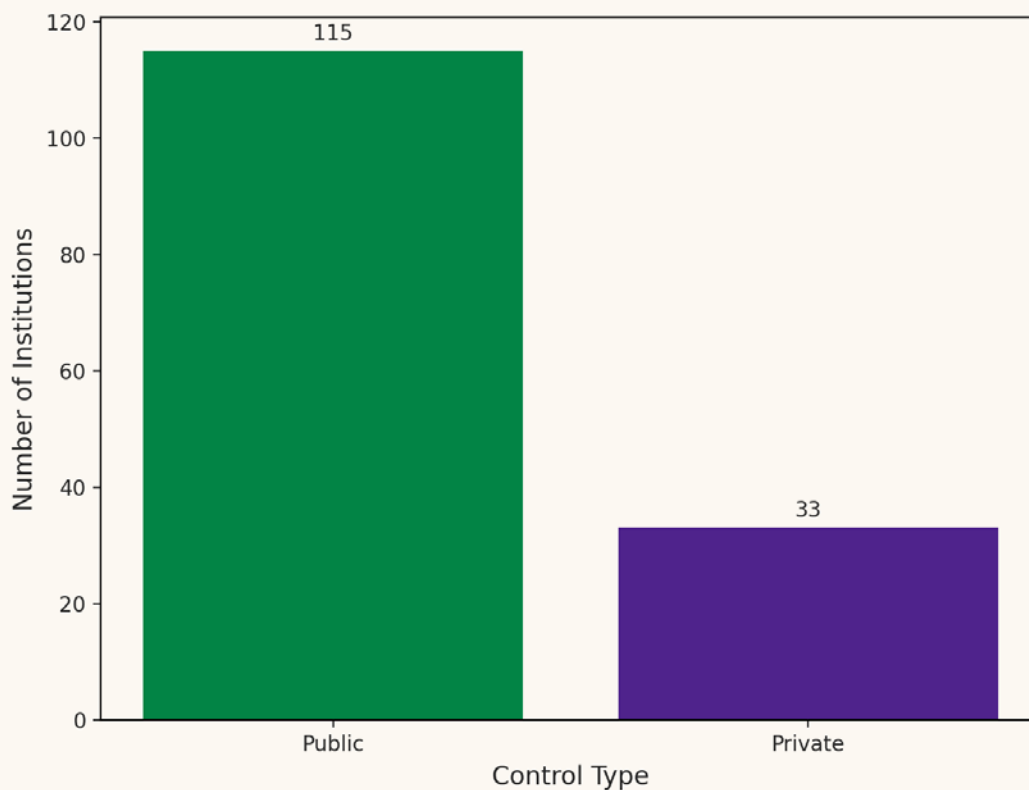


Figure 4. Comparison of the number of public vs. private higher education institutions that have adopted institutional statement neutrality.

## Public Institutions Represent 78% of Adopters of Institutional Statement Neutrality

**Public universities and colleges lead adoptions of statement neutrality policies, with 115 public institutions**, or 78% of the dataset, (see *Figure 4*) adopting such policies. This strong showing by public institutions likely reflects their unique position: they must balance academic freedom with their responsibility to serve their communities regardless of political viewpoint.

Moreover, as public institutions, they are subject to state laws and system-wide governing board policies pertaining to institutional statement neutrality. As a result of legislative action or institutional governing

board resolutions, public institutions in states including Georgia, Indiana, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Wisconsin engaged in wholesale adoption of institutional statement neutrality across their public university systems.

Only 33 private institutions, representing 22% of the dataset (see *Figure 4*), have adopted statement neutrality policies, suggesting they may feel less pressure to refrain from taking public stances on controversial issues. Also, since private institutions are not part of larger university systems, each must deliberate and adopt such a policy independently.

# Research Universities Lead in Adoptions of Statement Neutrality

Research intensive universities—institutions with “very high research activity” according to the 2021 Carnegie Classification—amount to 36% of institutional statement neutrality adoptions in U.S. institutions (see *Figure 5*), representing 52 of the most influential institutions in U.S. higher education. Medium-sized master’s universities and R2 universities respectively account for 20% and 16% of statement neutrality adoptions across the U.S. sector.

Even more striking, 47% of the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU) members have adopted statement neutrality policies. With 34 AAU institutions embracing this approach, these influential research universities are helping to establish statement neutrality as a new norm in higher education governance.

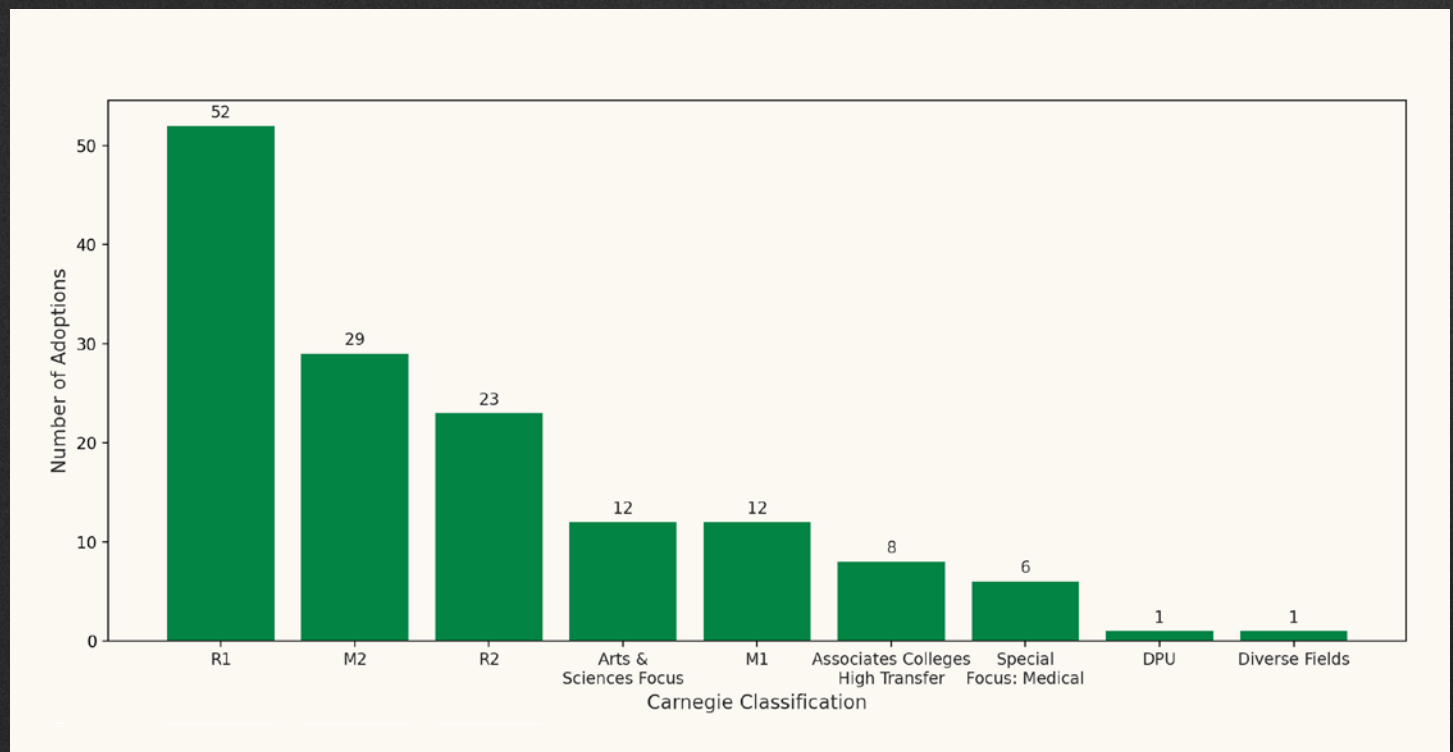


Figure 5. Number of institutional statement neutrality adoptions by Carnegie Classification type. N = 144; U.S. institutions only.



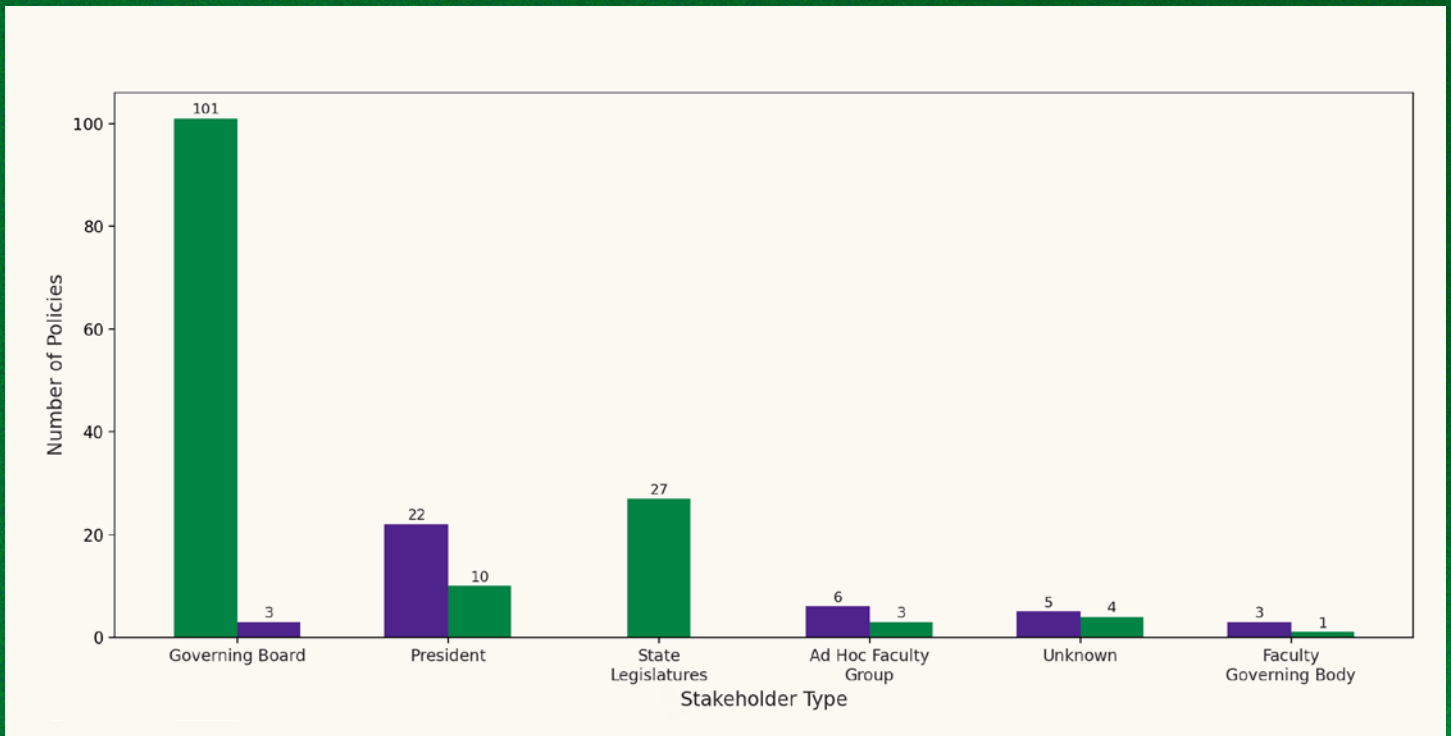


Figure 6. Decision-makers in the adoption of institutional statement neutrality comparing public institutions (green) to private (purple).

# Public and Private Institutions Follow Different Routes to Adoption of Statement Neutrality

The path to adopting statement neutrality policies varies significantly between public and private institutions, reflecting different approaches to institutional governance for this type of policy change (see *Figure 6*).

At public institutions, governing boards have been largely responsible for the official changes, with 101 adoptions, or 68%, involving board action. In 27 cases, this specifically reflects the influence of state law; Indiana, Utah, and North Carolina have mandated statement neutrality for their public institutions of higher education.

At private institutions, the picture looks quite different. Presidents and faculty bodies are the primary drivers of adopting institutional statement neutrality, with 22 adoptions (15%) of policy changes being driven by the university president. Comparatively, governing boards are playing a much smaller role at private institutions with only three adoptions being driven in this way, reflecting private institutions' greater autonomy in setting institutional policy.

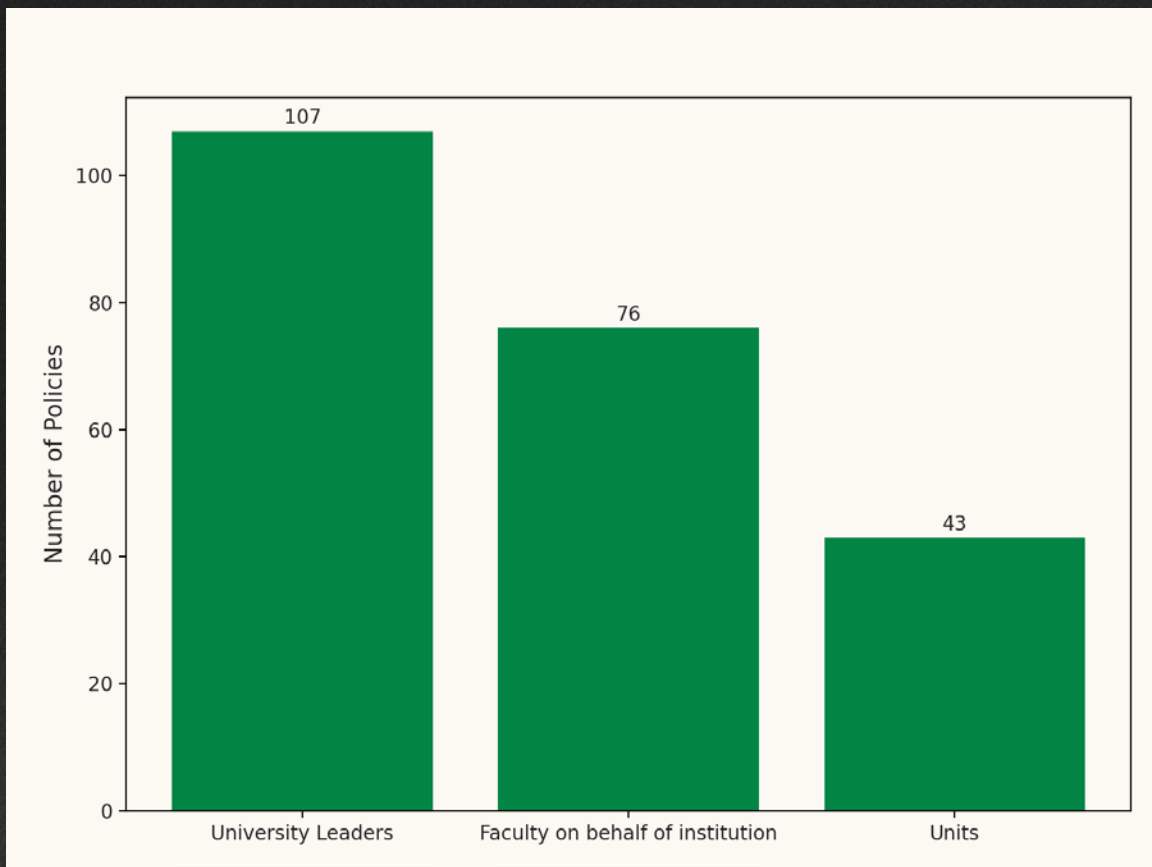


Figure 7. Scope of application of institutional statement neutrality policies.

## *Statement Neutrality Policies*

# **Most Affect Institutional Leaders.**

## *Half Affect Faculty Speaking on Behalf of the Institution.*

Institutional statement neutrality policies typically apply to some combination of three key groups within universities: university leaders, such as presidents, deans, and other senior administrators who often function as spokespersons for the entire institution; academic sub-units, such as departments, schools, or colleges within a university, or other sub-units such as research institutes; and individual faculty when speaking in an official capacity specifically as a representative of the institution.

Importantly, statement neutrality policies are not meant to silence individual voices but to bring more forth. Restraint by institutional leaders can serve to encourage professors and students to apply their academic and personal energies to questions of public importance. As the Kalven Report put it, “The neutrality of the university... has its complement in the fullest freedom for its faculty and students as individuals to participate in political action and social protest. It finds its complement, too, in the obligation of the university to provide a forum for the most



searching and candid discussion of public issues.” Principled leaders must defend the speech-rights of faculty members and students alike. This distinction—between institutional positions and individual expression—is crucial for maintaining both neutrality and academic freedom.

Across the dataset, not surprisingly, university leaders are the primary group affected by statement neutrality policies (see *Figure 7*), with 72% of policies requiring institutional leaders to refrain from taking positions on social and political issues in public statements, with a common exception being unless such statements are directly relevant to the institution’s mission. While it might seem obvious that these policies would always

apply to institutional leaders, we found that some policies were not explicit on the matter. To ensure accuracy, we only coded policies as applying to leaders only if they specifically mentioned them.

51% of the policies apply to faculty when speaking in an official capacity, but often these policies also emphasize that faculty remain free to express their personal views.

Academic subunits are least implicated in neutrality policies, with just 29% of policies explicitly extending neutrality to departments, schools, and other subunits on campus.

## *From Taking Stances to* **Fostering Open Inquiry**

The rapid adoption of institutional statement neutrality policies marks a major shift in how colleges and universities engage with broader societal debates. By refraining from taking institutional stances on contentious issues, universities can help create campus climates where diverse perspectives can flourish without students and scholars feeling ostracized for having views that don’t match up with their institutional superiors.

Statement neutrality not only empowers students, faculty, and staff to engage in robust debate, it also reinforces the critical values of seeking truth and generating knowledge rather than advocating for partisan political positions. In an era of declining public confidence in higher education, these policies represent a critical step toward restoring universities as trusted spaces for free inquiry and intellectual growth.

Heterodox Academy is at the forefront of advocating for open inquiry and intellectual freedom on our campuses, encouraging higher education institutions to focus on knowledge generation above partisan politics. We consequently provide support to universities in their efforts to adopt institutional statement neutrality.

You can help us promote open inquiry and viewpoint diversity by encouraging institutional statement neutrality at your college or university. For more information on institutional statement neutrality, please [visit our website](#) and read “[Extraordinary U: The HxA Model of Statement Neutrality](#).”

## How We Conducted This Research

We tracked institutional statement neutrality policies through 2024 using news reports and information from our members.

For each institution, we documented:

- when they adopted the policy;
- who was involved in making the decision;
- what parts of the institution the policy affects;
- the institution's size and type;
- documentation of the policy.

We also read the full text of 64 public documents where institutional statements neutrality policies were announced and identified four themes and associated keywords:

- free speech & academic freedom: freedom, expression, academic freedom, free speech, speech;
- balancing individual rights and institutional responsibilities: balance, responsibility, safe;
- community and inclusion: community, inclusion, diverse, welcoming;
- public trust: trust, governance, public, accountability.

If a document's text contained a keyword for a given theme, it was coded as TRUE for that theme; otherwise, it was coded as FALSE.

Note that because some documents announcing statement neutrality apply to whole higher education systems that include many universities and colleges, the number of such documents does not match the number of institutions that have adopted institutional statement neutrality.

This may not be a complete list of all institutions that have adopted these policies. If you know of others, please contact us at [research@heterodoxacademy.org](mailto:research@heterodoxacademy.org). We welcome discussion of this research brief. To make this easy, HxA makes its data on institutional statement neutrality adoptions and the analysis code used to write this research report publicly available on its [website](#).

## Acknowledgments

This data collection project and report were made possible in part by the support of the [Templeton Religion Trust](#), the [Mike and Sofia Segal Foundation](#), and other HxA donors. The opinions expressed in this report are those of HxA alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of its donors or members.

## About Heterodox Academy

[Heterodox Academy](#) (HxA) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization including 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. Founded in 2015 by Jonathan Haidt, Chris Martin, and Nicholas Rosenkranz, HxA has been working for nearly a decade to educate academics about the value of viewpoint diversity in research and teaching and to create campus cultures in which open inquiry thrives. With 74 HxA campus chapters to date, and members at more than 1,800 institutions, HxA advances its mission through policy advocacy, member organizing, and a belief in the potential of our institutions of higher education.

If you are interested in supporting our mission, [become a member](#) or [make a donation](#) to support our work. (Donors of at least \$120 a year, or just \$10 per month, will receive a yearlong [print subscription to \*inquisitive\*](#), HxA's quarterly periodical of ideas, as our gift to you.) If you want to stay up-to-date on HxA news, the latest HxA content, or upcoming HxA events, [subscribe to our emails](#).

For media inquiries contact [press@heterodoxacademy.org](mailto:press@heterodoxacademy.org)



# Appendix:

## *Institutions That Have Adopted Institutional Statement Neutrality*

University of Chicago	11/1/1967
Carnegie Mellon University	10/1/1970
Reed College	4/19/1971
California Institute of Technology	9/1/2014
Colby College	2/1/2020
Brown University	5/13/2022
Claremont McKenna College	2/5/2023
Vanderbilt University	3/1/2023
Williams College	10/12/2023
University of Denver	10/17/2023
Mount Holyoke College	10/24/2023
Southern Utah University	12/1/2023
University of Utah	12/1/2023
Utah State University	12/1/2023
Utah Tech University	12/1/2023
Utah Valley University	12/1/2023
Weber State University	12/1/2023
University of Wyoming	12/13/2023
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	1/17/2024
University of Tennessee at Martin	1/17/2024
University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center	1/17/2024
University of Tennessee Knoxville	1/17/2024
University of Tennessee Southern	1/17/2024
College of the Holy Cross	1/20/2024
Columbia University	2/20/2024
Princeton University	2/29/2024
Western Kentucky University	3/25/2024
University of Toronto	4/26/2024
Syracuse University	5/7/2024
University of Oregon	5/10/2024
Harvard University	5/28/2024
Stanford University	5/30/2024
University of California, Davis	6/5/2024
Purdue University	6/10/2024
Purdue University Fort Wayne	6/10/2024
Purdue University Northwest	6/10/2024
Appalachian State University	6/28/2024
East Carolina University	6/28/2024
Elizabeth City State University	6/28/2024
Fayetteville State University	6/28/2024

North Carolina A&T State University	6/28/2024
North Carolina Central University	6/28/2024
North Carolina State University	6/28/2024
University of North Carolina, Asheville	6/28/2024
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	6/28/2024
University of North Carolina, Charlotte	6/28/2024
University of North Carolina, Greensboro	6/28/2024
University of North Carolina, Pembroke	6/28/2024
University of North Carolina, Wilmington	6/28/2024
Western Carolina University	6/28/2024
Winston-Salem State University	6/28/2024
McGill University	8/8/2024
University of Virginia	8/13/2024
Johns Hopkins University	8/15/2024
Ohio State University	8/17/2024
University of Southern California	8/20/2024
University of Kentucky	8/20/2024
Emerson College	8/20/2024
Tulane University	8/23/2024
Stephen F. Austin State University	8/23/2024
University of Texas at Arlington	8/23/2024
University of Texas at Dallas	8/23/2024
University of Texas at El Paso	8/23/2024
University of Texas at Permian Basin	8/23/2024
University of Texas at San Antonio	8/23/2024
University of Texas at Tyler	8/23/2024
University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston	8/23/2024
University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio	8/23/2024
University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center	8/23/2024
University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston	8/23/2024
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley	8/23/2024
University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center	8/23/2024
University of Texas, Austin	8/23/2024
Cornell University	8/26/2024
University of Colorado, Boulder	8/28/2024
Haverford College	8/28/2024
Amherst College	9/4/2024
University of Alabama	9/5/2024
University of Alabama Birmingham	9/5/2024
University of Alabama, Huntsville	9/5/2024
Simon Fraser University	9/9/2024
University of Pennsylvania	9/10/2024
Barnard College	9/11/2024
University of California, Los Angeles	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire	9/12/2024



University of Wisconsin, Green Bay	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, La Crosse	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Madison	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Parkside	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Platteville	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, River Falls	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Stout	9/12/2024
University of Wisconsin, Whitewater	9/12/2024
Indiana University Bloomington	9/13/2024
Indiana University Columbus	9/13/2024
Indiana University East	9/13/2024
Indiana University Fort Wayne	9/13/2024
Indiana University Kokomo	9/13/2024
Indiana University Northwest	9/13/2024
Indiana University South Bend	9/13/2024
Indiana University Southeast	9/13/2024
Indiana University, Indianapolis	9/13/2024
Washington State University	9/13/2024
Queen's University	9/19/2024
Texas A&M University	9/23/2024
Texas Woman's University	9/23/2024
Drexel University	9/24/2024
Franklin & Marshall College	9/26/2024
Northwestern University	9/27/2024
Louisiana State University	10/10/2024
University of Michigan	10/17/2024
Clark University	10/20/2024
University of Iowa	10/28/2024
University of Massachusetts Amherst	10/28/2024
Yale University	10/31/2024
Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College	11/12/2024
Albany State University	11/12/2024
Atlanta Metropolitan State College	11/12/2024
Augusta University	11/12/2024
Clayton State University	11/12/2024
College of Coastal Georgia	11/12/2024
Columbus State University	11/12/2024
Dalton State College	11/12/2024
East Georgia State College	11/12/2024
Fort Valley State University	11/12/2024
Georgia College and State University	11/12/2024
Georgia Gwinnett College	11/12/2024

Georgia Highlands College	11/12/2024
Georgia Institute of Technology	11/12/2024
Georgia Southern University	11/12/2024
Georgia Southwestern State University	11/12/2024
Georgia State University	11/12/2024
Gordon State College	11/12/2024
Kennesaw State University	11/12/2024
Middle Georgia State University	11/12/2024
Savannah State University	11/12/2024
South Georgia State College	11/12/2024
University of Georgia	11/12/2024
University of North Georgia	11/12/2024
University of West Georgia	11/12/2024
Valdosta State University	11/12/2024
Michigan State University	12/4/2024
George Mason University	12/5/2024
Dartmouth College	12/10/2024
Colgate University	12/10/2024