ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND THE INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

FRAMWWORK FOR CAMPUS DELIBERATION

As part of Ohio State's Civil Discourse Project, students are invited to engage on a tough, important issue in "Shop Class for Democracy" forums. Concerns about academic freedom have recently become the focus for much more than just those on campus. Our campus community must navigate the current environment in which many criticize universities as sites of indoctrination, our commitment to academic freedom and excellence as well as an inclusive, respectful campus, and the needs of students, especially those who might be more vulnerable.

The following sets out three options for addressing this tension. The examples of actions that might be taken are not the only ones, but are offered simply to promote concrete discussion and the weighing of consequences and tradeoffs. The purpose of this framework and this forum is deliberation and the discovery of where we may have common ground.

Prioritize the psychological safety and well-being of all students.

Universities are responsible first and foremost for protecting student safety and well-being, and this includes protecting students, faculty, and staff from harassment and discrimination and providing an environment where students can learn without harming their psychological health. Students from some communities, especially historically marginalized ones, may have greater need for protection and support, and the university should provide this even if it impinges on others' freedom.

Examples of what could be done:	Some consequences or tradeoffs to consider:
The University should allocate funds and resources to encourage programs that engage diversity, equity and inclusion in classes and elsewhere on campus.	Such policies may underscore the perception student affairs disproportionately supports a left-leaning agenda and may create another authority structure that limits dissent and opposing viewpoints.
Develop policies to restrict using university resources to platform outside speakers who espouse views that may conflict with the institution's diversity, equity and inclusion policies and goals	This would mean that University policymakers can and must limit the views that students are allowed to be exposed to, and could invite accusations of bias.
Faculty, staff, and students should create safe spaces on campus for specific student populations (e.g., LGBTQIA students, student veterans, first-generation students).	Students may choose to isolate themselves within these spaces, limiting opportunities for cross-cultural engagement.

Encourage diversity and dialogue across differences to make education more rigorous and "real world."

Diversity and inclusion aren't just about fairness, they also produce a higher quality of education—research has shown that diverse teams make enterprises more effective. A learning culture built around diversity of experience and views may well involve some discomfort, for both students and faculty. But by exposing faculty and students to a range of different viewpoints, students develop their critical thinking and may discover a sense of agency and power in being able to respond that will be useful after college.

Examples of what could be done:	Some consequences or tradeoffs to consider:
Institutional leaders, including students, faculty, and staff, should create space for educationally meaningful, diverse perspectives to be heard on campus and should prioritize diversity of ideas and experience throughout the academic context.	Some perspectives may directly or indirectly affect learning or cause harm to students. Also, decisions about what is "educationally meaningful" could be seen as subjective and/or ideologically-driven.
Faculty should be neutral arbiters of ideas and encourage students to engage with ideas they find uncomfortable.	Historically marginalized faculty, staff, and students may be vulnerable and expected to carry a heavier burden to represent minority perspectives, potentially damaging their personal and professional development and increasing potential for physical and psychological harm.
Faculty and staff should create programming that empowers students to engage productively with diverse perspectives while developing their own voice and agency.	Not all students may see developing their own voice and agency as crucial to their academic goals, which could leave the campus community as a whole open to being dominated by either the status quo or the loudest voices in the conversation.

Uphold the ideals of academic freedom and free inquiry.

The highest purpose of a university is to find and follow truth, wherever it may lead. Stifling academic freedom even for well-intentioned reasons undercuts our university's drive for academic excellence. Galileo was imprisoned by authorities for his intellectual freedom— what other ideas might we miss if we are willing to forbid certain kinds of inquiry? Rigorous debate and critique in the marketplace of ideas should govern our search for truth, not current University policies.

Examples of what could be done:	Some consequences or tradeoffs to consider:
Institutional leadership should place emphasis on unrestricted academic freedom and excellence in research and in the classroom.	Faculty may espouse ideological perspectives or attitudes that students find offensive, yet students must remain enrolled or engaged in that environment due to academic requirements. Some students might also have or adopt ideas that others find offensive, promoting unconstructive conflict on campus.
Institutions should allow any speakers or on campus, no matter who or what they represent.	The university may be seen as endorsing or condoning an unpopular or offensive message. This may damage the university's reputation or affect funding streams. They could also motivate some students to behave in ways that conflict with University values and policy.
Those who disagree with speech should be free to protest or object without institutionally imposed restrictions.	Outside groups may take advantage of the freedom of the marketplace of ideas to overwhelm a speaker they disagree with and drown them out.

Additional info and questions for deliberation

Option 1 prioritizes the institution's responsibility to its students to ensure their safety and well-being. Some however, might see this sense of what the responsibility is as veering into paternalism, assuming that students, especially from historically marginalized groups, will not be able to avoid being harmed without safe spaces and special considerations. And in fact some groups may see the University's taking the responsibility to try to supplant systemic racism and bias as evidence of their own political bias

Questions to consider:

- What harms is the University trying to protect students from?
- Depending on the kinds of harms, what is the University's proper responsibility?
- Should there be a difference in how students from different communities are supported, and if so, why?
- Might there be other ways of securing students' safety and well-being?
- Do any students lose anything by the University taking on this role?

Option 2 prioritizes the values of diversity and inclusion, not only as values in and of themselves, but as means to more rigorous and real-world excellence. This option asks us to be ok with exposing students and faculty to some discomfort and uncertainty in the pursuit of a campus environment that encourages a wide range of views, respectfully shared. This means that situations where there are disagreement and conflicts springing from ideological diversity are not to be avoided, but managed, while also having strong boundaries about behaviors that are unacceptable.

Questions to consider:

- Will some faculty, staff or students bear more of the discomfort as these conflicts inevitably occur?
- Who should set the boundaries for behavior?
- How would such boundaries be enforced?
- Should a University even be in the business of managing conflicts due to ideological or political difference? Does this detract from their educational mission?

Option 3 prioritizes the University, faculty and students' unrestrained freedom to seek truth and academic excellence. This option says that sometimes the questioning process and conflict of ideas may be highly charged, but no ideas should be put off-limits. Students would be supported to explore a wider field of ideas and while the University would still be able to promote respect, diversity, and inclusion, it would not be able to restrict any academic or other learning behavior by students or faculty.

Questions to consider:

- What is meant by academic excellence?
- What kinds of ideas or views might this include?
- Would any students, faculty or staff suffer harm from this? What kind of harm?
- Might any group suffer more harm than another?
- Will the University itself be harmed by supporting faculty, students or speakers with unpopular views?