

Defending Education President Nicole Neily Gives Remarks at the White House Education Compact Roundtable Series: Biased Professors, Woke Administrators, and the End of Free Inquiry on US Campuses

Thank you, it's an honor to be here.

Our friend Charlie Kirk was murdered three months ago, an event that continues to haunt many in this room and across the country. Sadly, his death is the apotheosis of the disease that has been metastasizing on campus for decades. William F. Buckley wrote “God and Man at Yale” in 1951 and Allan Bloom wrote “The Closing of the American Mind” in 1987 – but their concerns were meant to serve as a warning and not as an instruction manual.

Fast forward to this week: just yesterday, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education [released](#) a poll which found that 91 percent of undergraduate students believe that words can be violence. Think about that: if *words* are violence, then that means actual physical violence itself would be justified. Little wonder, then, that the same FIRE poll found that 32 percent said it was acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech, while 71 percent said that shutdowns were acceptable. The days of “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me” are long gone.

Self-censorship is rampant among students and faculty alike, who credibly fear repercussions for expressing their true thoughts or having the temerity to ask a heterodox question in class. Elaborate webs of **regulations and policies** punish “wrong think” through death by a thousand cuts; **bias response teams** define “hate” liberally, encouraging students to file anonymous online reports and calling them in for star chamber hearings to intimidate not only the alleged perpetrator, but to chill others who might share similar opinions; and **security fees** are foisted upon the few student organizations brave enough to invite an interesting speaker, sending a message that curiosity and conversation are unwelcome. And let's not forget the sword of Damocles hanging over students' heads, who fear their grades will take a hit if they express an opinion contrary to a professor – or, for that matter, over professors' heads as they seek tenure through a convoluted process that necessitates the approval of their peers. (For context, a report from the Education Freedom Institute [found](#) that 93 percent of political donations made by college professors went to Democrats.)

But who – or what – has been driving these efforts on campus? **Unfortunately, in far too many cases, the answer is *university administrators themselves*.** We're in a horror movie, and the call has been coming from inside the house the whole time.

Tenured professors regularly publish peer-reviewed articles that claim that students learn better from teachers with the same skin color... and are applauded for this by their institutions' DEI departments. Schools across the country offer racially segregated graduation ceremonies. And when Secretary DeVos reined in out-of-control Title IX offices by putting in place constitutional guardrails that respected due process and the First Amendment, college officials screamed bloody murder. This is not progress, and it

is not bringing our country together. It is sowing division where none should exist and teaching our students to hate not only our country, but each other.

This is why I – and countless Americans – are grateful that the Trump administration has taken bold steps to address the rot at the heart of academia. **From day one, the President’s commitment to equal protection under the law FOR ALL has been steadfast – and it is making a difference.** Executive orders addressing racial and sex discrimination, admissions transparency, and more have sent a clear message to the ivory tower: the days of doling out taxpayer-funded spoils based on identity politics are over.

From my vantage point as a watchdog, an alumna, and a university board member, I see the responses to the administration’s actions falling into three buckets:

1. The schools that are determined to “resist,”
2. The schools that want to comply in good faith,
3. And the schools that are pretending to comply by putting lipstick on a pig, renaming departments but continuing their nefarious programming, hoping to wait out our brave Secretary and her team.

In my mind this last bucket is the most dangerous, because of the intent – but fortunately my team and I at Defending Education are determined to expose these miscreants so they can be held accountable. Just last week, my colleagues discovered materials at the University of Minnesota regarding a “Whiteness Pandemic” which claims that “the centuries-old culture of Whiteness” (also known as Western culture) and the family system are responsible for perpetuating systemic racism.

The administration’s whole-of-government approach – and its ensuing settlements with schools like Columbia, Harvard, and Northwestern – have shown universities that there is a real price to be paid – not only reputationally, but also financially – for defying federal law.

The schools that plan to wait out our tireless Secretary, Attorney General Bondi, and other cabinet agencies are playing a dangerous game... and the odds aren’t in their favor.

Obviously, it’s going to take a lot of work to unwind decades of dysfunction – which is why I’m grateful the administration is thinking creatively about how to incentivize schools to uphold the principles that should undergird American higher education: free inquiry, merit, colorblindness, and excellence.

The Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education has forced a long-overdue conversation about what the role of higher education in America should be, versus where it currently is. Although it’s tragic that schools need to be reminded to hire and promote faculty based on talent and not traits – or to admit students based on ability and not ideology – I am confident that these focused reforms will lead to an education landscape that actually provides students with the high-quality education that they, their families, and our country deserve.

Thank you,

Nicole Neily

Defending Ed President and Founder