



July 13, 2021

Lt. General Richard M. Clark
Superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 3100
USAF Academy, CO 80840

Dear Lt. General Clark,

Principles of academic freedom and free speech include the right of professors to publish op-eds on matters of public concern without the threat of sanctions by their university employer. Unfortunately, members of Congress are not respecting those basic principles, and we call upon the United States Air Force Academy to hold firm to its stated principles.

Lynne Chandler Garcia is an associate professor of political science at the U.S. Air Force Academy. On July 6, 2021, Professor Garcia published an op-ed in the [Washington Post](#) explaining why she teaches critical race theory in her classes at the academy. The op-ed came in response to the growing [public controversy](#) over the role of [critical race theory](#) in American education generally and to a specific controversy arising from General [Mark A. Milley's](#) defense of teaching such theories at the military academies.

[Senator Tom Cotton](#) reacted to Professor Garcia's op-ed by declaring that "she has no business teaching the Constitution or political science to cadets at the air Force," and that she "should start looking for a different place of employment." Senator Cotton serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee. [Representative Mark Green](#) has formally written to the Acting Secretary of the Air Force declaring that Professor Garcia is "unqualified to teach in one of our prestigious military academies" and called for her to be "removed from her teaching position." Representative Green serves on the House Armed Services Committee.

These calls for Professor Garcia to be terminated are a clear threat to her academic freedom. Op-eds are a form of what the [American Association of University Professors](#) calls "extramural speech." Extramural speech is a protected form of freedom of expression. When professors "speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline." As the AAUP has emphasized, "The controlling principle is that a faculty member's expression of opinion as a citizen cannot constitute grounds for dismissal unless it clearly demonstrates the faculty member's unfitness for the position." The [United States Air Force Academy](#) embraces those principles. Although other [military academies](#) are [clearer](#) about their specific acceptance of the academic freedom principles articulated by the AAUP, the American military academies have generally recognized that members of their faculty should be free to research and publish on controversial topics as part of the advancement of truth.



Although the federal government has an interest in the professional speech of the members of the faculty at the military academies and Congress can by statute regulate the curriculum of the military academies, teaching controversial materials within a faculty member's area of expertise and publishing op-eds regarding those teaching choices are well within the protections for academic freedom [traditionally recognized](#) by the military academies. It is entirely possible to teach critical race theory without indoctrinating students into a particular ideological belief by introducing a range of ideas and engaging with them critically, and an important component of academic freedom is the freedom to teach and discuss relevant, though controversial, topics and materials in the classroom. To assert that an instructor is "unqualified" to teach in a military academy and should be fired because she would include materials within her courses with which an individual member of Congress disagrees would gut academic freedom at the academies.

For legislators with the responsibility of oversight of the U.S. armed forces to call for the termination of a member of the faculty of the military academy because they disagree with the views that she expressed in an opinion piece published in a national newspaper is a grave threat to academic freedom. The AFA calls upon the leadership of the Air Force Academy and the United States military to reaffirm and adhere to its academic freedom principles by making clear that Professor Garcia will be not be sanctioned in any way for her constitutionally protected speech.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "KW", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Keith Whittington
Chair, Academic Committee, Academic Freedom Alliance
William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Politics, Princeton University