



March 27, 2022

Dear President Eisgruber,

The Academic Freedom Alliance (AFA) is a coalition of faculty members from across the country and across the ideological spectrum who are committed to upholding the principles of academic freedom and professorial free speech.

We wish to express our concern about the continued action of a Princeton campus administrative unit to denounce a member of the university's faculty. As you know, on July 8, 2020, Professor Joshua Katz published an opinion piece in an online journal reacting to the [July 4th public letter](#) signed by many members of the Princeton faculty. In that piece he criticized a student group that had operated on campus a few years earlier and hyperbolically characterized it as a "[small local terrorist group](#)." This piece generated a series of responses on campus, including the [university's spokesman](#) claim that Professor Katz would be investigated for potential disciplinary action as a result of his extramural speech. More recently, in a university-sponsored [freshman orientation event](#) Professor Katz was singled out for criticism by the Carl Fields Center for Equality and Cultural Understanding. On a [website](#) bearing the copyright of the board of trustees of the university and co-sponsored by myriad university administrative units including the Office of the Vice Provost of Institutional Equity and Diversity, Professor Katz is held out as an example of a professor making a racist statement and is shown being denounced by the university president, the Classics department, and the chairs of two academic units for engaging in racist speech.

A university provides a forum for many diverse voices, and it is inevitable that disagreements will arise. There is nothing wrong with members of the faculty criticizing one another on matters ranging from the scholarly to the political, and principles of academic freedom and free speech should provide robust protections against university reprisals for professors expressing such disagreements. Such criticism properly includes that of student groups who have voluntarily entered the public domain and taken public positions and actions.

But it is hard to see the actions of the Carl Fields Center as anything other than ongoing retaliation for Professor Katz's speech. For university officials in their individual capacities to sharply criticize a professor for his speech is one thing. For the administration to memorialize criticism and to highlight it as the introduction of every student to the university campus is something else. We are not aware of any other example of a university systematically denouncing a sitting member of its own faculty in such a way. It is not an example that should be followed or repeated if universities are to remain vibrant centers of intellectual freedom.



The university climate would quickly become poisonous and intolerable if administrative units on campus made it a practice to hold up dissenting members of the faculty for ritual condemnation and if the precedent now being set were followed in the future. If the Office of the Vice President for Campus Life uses its administrative position on campus to organize official university programming for the purpose of heaping opprobrium on faculty for expressing disfavored personal political opinions, the risks of chilling speech on campus are severe. The university can hardly create a climate welcoming of heterodox opinions if it creates an administrative apparatus to target the heterodox and stamp them as campus pariahs.

On the [website](#), a quote from Professor Katz's article was changed to erase "(including the many black students)" from his characterization of those whom the group made life miserable on campus when they disagreed with the group's views. The alteration of his sentence also altered his meaning in material ways, eliminating his particular concern for the interests of certain black students. Such a misrepresentation of a quote is, of course, inconsistent with the university's own requirements regarding academic dishonesty and a troubling model to hold up to incoming students at orientation. We are pleased to see that the quote has been corrected, but are disappointed that the correction was made through a stealth edit with no acknowledgement of the error and certainly with no apology to Professor Katz for the misrepresentation of his writing.

Professors expressing controversial political opinions should expect criticism from members of the campus community, and if those views are unpopular then no doubt such criticism will be loud. However, professors should not have to anticipate that the university administration will adopt those criticisms as its own and place members of its faculty in the pillory as an object lesson for each class of entering students to learn where the boundaries of acceptable speech can be found.

We call on the university to refrain from using its administrative resources to target Professor Katz or other members of the faculty in its official activities and programming.

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



cc. Professor Joshua Katz
Ramona Romero, General Counsel
Louise Sams, Chair, Board of Trustees