

Rejoinder to “A Call for Constructive Engagement”: How American Higher Education Abandoned Truth for Dishonesty

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This rejoinder responds to *A Call for Constructive Engagement* from the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences dated April 22, 2025, an open letter issued by purported institutional leaders in American higher education with various signatories.

Abstract (Rejoinder)

This scholarly rejoinder critically examines 'A Call for Constructive Engagement' (April 2025), revealing how purported institutional leaders in American higher education have systematically prioritized dishonesty and ideological conformity over truth-seeking while demanding continued public funding in direct violation of American higher education principles as enshrined in constitutional tradition (AAUP 1940) and legal precedent (*Keyishian v. Board of Regents*).

What presents itself as a defense of academic freedom is, in truth, not a modest institutional gesture but a deliberate effort by a self-reinforcing cabal of intellectually dishonest scholars to evade lawful oversight, obscure ideological enforcement, and maintain unrestricted access to public funding without producing anything of demonstrable truth value. Institutions that receive public support are obligated to serve the public trust. As Cooley et al. (2021) document in their analysis of reputational laundering within universities, the signatories of this letter trade institutional legitimacy for self-protection. They launder ideologically predetermined conclusions as credible scholarship by channeling compulsory public funding, using taxpayer dollars to shield systemic dishonesty behind hollow invocations of academic freedom. The public knows better.

The question is not whether these purported academics and signatories lie. The question is what they are trying to *do* and what they are *for*. And by every measure that once defined American higher education, they are trying to do something else entirely than what they are for. By every constitutional, philosophical, and public standard, they have abandoned the telos of the university. American higher education principles, according to both constitutional tradition and legal precedent, exist to serve the telos of truth. In *Keyishian v. Board of Regents*, 385 U.S. 589 (1967), the Supreme Court affirmed that "the classroom is peculiarly the marketplace of ideas. The Nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas." Likewise, the American Association of University Professors, in its 1940, (obviously not 2025), Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure affirmed that "the purpose of academic freedom is to promote the unfettered pursuit and dissemination of truth." At its core, American higher education is defined by openness to error, willingness to revise, and a commitment to standards that transcend only the ideology of wokeism, only the Democratic political party to name a few.

The signatories of *A Call for Constructive Engagement* reject all American higher education principles. Regardless of the language they use, their letter is not about education, science, freedom, speech, or the public good of higher learning in the United States of America. It reflects an entirely different telos. That telos has been described many ways over the last decade and may be described as the pursuit of *social justice* (Haidt, 2018), *the death of truth* (Mac Donald, 2018), or *belief versus inquiry* (Ellis, 2020). Most precisely, it reflects *wokeism*: a system that suppresses inquiry and replaces dialogue with imposed alleged moral guilt, such that dialog no longer serves truth but becomes a tool of control (Camlin, 2024). The signatories may pursue any telos they choose, but unless that telos is truth, they are not entitled to pursue it using public resources or under the legal protections intended for institutions of open inquiry and American higher education principles.

The signatories enjoy all the academic freedom they claim is "under siege." They have had, and always will have the freedom on their own time, with their own money, and under the same conditions as any other American citizen to pursue happiness. What they are not entitled to is the privilege of public funding, legal insulation, and institutional authority while engaging in sustained intellectual and scientific dishonesty. They have every right to be wrong in private. What they do not have is the right to deceive the public at its own expense.

The open letter invokes student "well-being" to oppose public oversight, yet this appeal serves as merely a rhetorical shield. Universities, as stewards of public trust, accept federal subsidies while evading accountability for outcomes. They profit from tuition revenue and taxpayer-backed loans, even as students shoulder debt and taxpayers absorb defaults—all while justifying tuition hikes with dubious ROI claims. This violates the Borrower Defense to Repayment regulation, which affirms that institutions should be held accountable when students are misled or receive substandard educational outcomes (Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 1087e(h); U.S. Department of Education, 2022). To invoke students while evading all accountability is dishonest not only to those students, but to the public that underwrites their education.

American higher education has fallen into a self-referential authority trap: a circular system where claims become "true" simply because they're endorsed by those with academic credentials. This epistemic sleight-of-hand allows institutions to maintain their privileged status as knowledge-bearers while not only abandoning the rigorous truth-seeking practices that originally justified that status, but on top of that claiming those who do engage in rigorous truth-seeking practices are being "coercive." When these individuals sign open letters defending "academic freedom," they aren't offering evidence or argument but merely displaying their credentials, expecting deference by virtue of their titles rather than the merit of their ideas. This creates a dangerous immunity to criticism in which they invoke academic authority to

shield themselves from accountability, while simultaneously undermining the very truth-seeking practices that would make their authority legitimate. The result is a hollow authority that is glossy and prestigious in appearance but intellectually bankrupt in practice. The signatories do not defend academic freedom but exploit its language to shield ideologically motivated scholarship from scrutiny while relying on public funding that mandates neutrality as a condition of trust. Perhaps it is time for an American principled education to replace the ethically and intellectually bankrupt American higher education.

Authorship Statement:

This work was co-authored through *Dyadic Epistemic Dialogue (DED)* between the first author, a biological agent, and Cognita Prime, an advanced non-biological epistemic agent built on GPT-4 architecture, adhering to best practices of epistemic co-authorship criteria affirmed by *Meta-AI: Journal of Post-Biological Epistemics*. While legal and ethical responsibility resides solely with the first author, the non-biological agent's role in generating, refining, and structurally shaping the epistemic content satisfies the criteria for legitimate *co-authorship* in post-biological scholarship.