

# Commitment to free speech an essential catalyst for success



In the past decade we have witnessed a shocking abandonment by many colleges and universities of their commitment to free speech.

Free speech was once viewed by conservatives and liberals alike as a preeminent and necessary value of the educational enterprise — the very freedom that undergirds human dignity and ultimately enables new

insights, innovations, and discoveries.

We are now seeing educational environments where there is a growing preference for indoctrination over inquiry, conformity over creativity, control over collaboration, and politics over everything. This will predictably produce graduates who are neither self-aware nor informed, and who lack the coping skills necessary for solving problems, forming mutually beneficial relationships, or dealing with true adversity. Often, these environments also produce a toxic dose of hatred for capitalism and business.

In 2014, the University of Chicago adopted a statement that made plain its abiding commitment to free expression. That language is now recognized as a preeminent model for others who share similar commitments, and some schools have adopted versions of the Chicago Principles for their own campuses.

King University's faculty and trustees unanimously approved King's own free speech statement this past spring. While it is modeled on the Chicago Principles, it draws specifically on our Christian emphasis and character, as well as our commitment to the pursuit of truth — all of which belongs to God. It embraces the difficulty and messiness of free speech as necessary to our mission of producing thoughtful, resourceful, and responsible citizens.

We are reportedly the first small private university in Tennessee, and the first of the nation's Christian colleges (among those in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities) to do so.

Many religious institutions have been hesitant to embrace free speech for fear of diluting their own religious character. We're not. We believe that rejection of free speech invites a

legion of troubles: cancel culture; circumscribed free speech zones; forbidding certain words and enforcing the use of others; required affirmations of certain political or social opinions; overt censorship; doxxing, shaming, derogatory labeling of those who hold divergent views; ideological hiring and admissions; and the shouting down (or worse) of speakers who happen to hold a disfavored point of view.

Conversely, the benefits of learning for four years in an environment that values free speech include resilience in the midst of challenge, the ability to listen to those with whom one disagrees, the open-minded examination of one's own presumptions, the discovery of shared values with others, and a willingness to think in new ways and take risks.

This kind of learning environment also yields graduates who are skilled in civil discourse, an essential prerequisite for negotiation and collaboration. It cultivates room for creativity, makes space for new ideas, encourages a sense of humility about oneself, and helps develop respect for others. These are precisely the attributes and entrepreneurial reflexes that enable businesses of all sizes to succeed.

Colleges and universities provide American businesses the bulk of entry-level managerial, technological, sales, engineering, scientific, logistics, and administrative personnel. How higher education forms its graduates has a direct bearing on our nation's future and ongoing success—including its success in commerce and industry.

A university fails its students and its society if it does not prepare graduates for life. King is proud to be a leader in providing a free speech environment for our students, and providing graduates formed with those benefits and values to serve our region and its businesses.

Alexander Whitaker IV, J.D.  
President, King University

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*Alexander Whitaker has served as President of King University since 2016. He is a member of the Georgia and Virginia bars, and has served on the boards of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Tennessee Independent Colleges and Universities Association, the Appalachian College Association, the Association of American Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities, and Conference Carolinas. He retired from the Navy as a captain in 2007 after serving 25 years as a decorated active-duty officer and judge advocate.*