

These two examples—one centered in an individual classroom and the other involving institutional decisions—speak to the diversity and complexity of the issues involved. It's easy to inveigh against silly scenarios. It's much harder to address real things that really happen. Do I tell my student that, even though she was the victim of a brutal assault in her past, that she must read testimony of gang-rape survivors in my course in order to uphold the sacred values of free intellectual inquiry? Sure, Charles Murray has a right to his views. But is it OK for us to use student fees paid in part by African American students to bring him to campus, fete him, and give him a rostrum to tell those students they're doomed by genetics to be inferior to whites? *Well, he makes a strong argument and isn't bound by conventional "niceties."* Yes, that's true. But that's also the reason people claim to like Donald Trump, and I don't see universities lining up to bring him in as a guest lecturer.

Ignoring the complexity of real-life situations is a common accusation hurled at academics and the academy in general. Why on earth would we be so eager, in this case, to prove those accusations true? To prevent imaginary sit-down strikes against Victorian Literature, we're willing to force students into a predetermined path where to deviate is to compromise academic integrity? Are we so scared of losing the intellectual heft of our curricula that we want to muzzle our students and deprive them of agency?

Or are we just afraid of our students challenging us and holding us accountable to the very values we profess?

As a faculty member, I would be enormously dismayed if my dean sent this letter to my incoming students. Because now they'll come into my class already having received a clear message about what my institution seems to value—and it isn't them. The Chicago letter reeks of arrogance, of a sense of entitlement, of an exclusionary mindset; in other words, the very



things it seeks to inveigh against. It's not about academic freedom, it's about power. *Know your place, and acknowledge ours*, it tells the students. *We'll be the judge of what you need to know and how you need to know it*. And professors and students are thus handcuffed to a high-stakes ideological creed. *Do it this way, in the name of all that is holy and true in the academy*. There is no room here for empathy, for student agency, or for faculty discretion.

Displaying empathy for the different experiences our students bring to the classroom is not a threat to our academic freedom. Allowing for a diversity of perspectives to flourish, even when that diversity might challenge the very structure of our course and its material, is not a threat but an opportunity. Our first reaction to expressions of student agency, even when they seem misguided or perhaps frivolous, should not be to shut it down. If we really value academic freedom, then we need to model that *with and for* our students. Ableism, misogyny, racism, elitism, and intellectual sloppiness deserve to be called out. That's not a threat, that's our students doing what they're supposed to as engaged citizens of an academic community. This year, we should challenge ourselves to quit fixating on caricatures and hypotheticals and instead acknowledge the actual landscape of teaching and learning in all its messiness and complexity. When we act out of fear, we do harm. When we assume the worst from our students, that's what we often end up getting—from them and from ourselves. We can do better than this.

(Note: I turned off the comments because some folks thought jumping into the comments and personally abusing others was a cool thing to do. For all those who left thoughtful comments and kept the conversation going for all of us to learn from, thank you. For those who came to abuse others, you're the reason we can't have nice things.)

