

AJHA Statement on Legislative Bills Targeting Academic Freedom

The number of legislative bills targeting the free exchange of ideas and the job security of those who promote it in the classroom is growing at a frightening pace. The American Journalism Historians Association (AJHA) calls on public officials and voters to protect higher education from those who seek to limit open inquiry, rigorous research, and honest debate, which advance knowledge in a democratic society.

Recently passed laws targeting Critical Race Theory and the analytical framework of intersectionality are detrimental to those who teach journalism and mass communication history. The restrictions have been so broadly defined that almost any discussion of inequality can be construed as a violation of the law. Such laws join other measures in targeting expression related to diverse identities involving race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. Many scholars in our field research inequalities within the history of media and how media have presented such issues to the public. It is essential that we be able to provide accurate analysis of these issues in their historical context for a truthful understanding of U.S. society and media's place in it.

Ignoring the standards of evidence expected in higher education, politicians have tried to prevent scholars from teaching what has been termed "woke indoctrination." Recent legislation has authorized eliminating departments whose curriculum is considered to promote "harmful" ideology. Though journalism and other mass communication departments may not be directly at risk for termination, the legislation does require departments to remove individual classes on these topics from their curriculum. Furthermore, through the imposed post-tenure review requirements, faculty whose work is seen as violating state law can lose their jobs.

The AJHA condemns these steps taken by politicians. We endorse the [1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#), which holds that "freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth. Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning." Given the curriculum deficiencies created by recent policies, we must recommend that students deciding where to attend school for journalism, mass communication, and history carefully consider the implications of legislation that restricts freedom of speech in higher education. Likewise, we must recommend that prospective faculty consider the impact this type of legislation could have on their careers, especially the challenges it poses for the tenure process, before taking positions at public colleges and universities in states that have implemented it.

As a professional organization committed to upholding the highest standards for the field, the AJHA supports the study and teaching of all aspects of journalism and mass communication history. Free speech is a constitutionally protected right, and one that has allowed journalism and mass communication to thrive in this country. Though people may not agree with one another's views, a free press is essential for public discourse. Knowing this nation's journalism and mass communication history is also essential for public discourse. To this end, the American Journalism Historians Association is an advocate for all engaged in the field.