**The Future We Stand For**  
***A Call for a National Day of Action for Higher Education for the Public Good: April 17, 2024***

**We Stand for Democracy — and the System of Higher Education that Sustains It**

Today both education and democracy are under attack. Institutions of higher education serve to educate the public and to help generate the reliable information, broad-ranging knowledge, and reasoned analysis that a democratic society requires. Colleges and universities are spaces where research and ideas—including challenging ones—are subject to rigorous study and critical evaluation. In the interest of democracy, our educational institutions must be allowed to function free from interference by politicians, CEOs, and lobbyists seeking to repress inquiry.

**We Stand for the Freedom to Teach and Learn**Education and research require free inquiry, the freedom to teach, students’ freedom to learn, freedom to publish, freedom of assembly and association, and the freedom to speak as members of the public. Academic freedom differs from freedom of speech; it does not protect every opinion within a university because it relies on the collective judgment of scholarship. For example, scholars and teachers have found such ideas as scientific racism, Holocaust denial, and intelligent design to be intellectually and thus academically indefensible. To ensure the continued social value of higher education, decisions about teaching and learning must be made by qualified faculty—not by those seeking to impose private and partisan interests.

**We Stand for the Democratic Value of Dissent**

Democracy, like education, requires both consent and dissent. We affirm the right of every student, teacher, worker, and community member to assemble and to speak out on issues of public concern. Protest is a form of learning and community-building; it should be respected by colleges and universities as an essential component of education.

**We Stand for Higher Education for All**

Higher education is a public good, not only because it trains students for careers but also because learning and thinking are valuable in themselves for all members of the public. Protecting civil rights and advancing racial equality are essential to the public mission of colleges and universities, just as they are essential to a thriving democracy. High quality education at every level should be the right of all. Yet federal and state divestment has made the cost of college prohibitive, and recent attacks on diversity and equity threaten to make educational access more unequal. The burden of lifelong debt jeopardizes futures, while predatory interest on loans unfairly forces poorer students to shoulder higher costs than wealthier students. To ensure equality of access, we must make public higher education freely available to all by reversing decades of budget cuts and reinvesting in our globally leading university systems.   
  
**We Stand for Job Security**

Federal and state defunding of public institutions not only harms the futures and livelihoods of students and employees; it also undermines the quality of education. Teaching has been converted into exploitative gig work through management practices shaped by manufactured austerity. Over 70% of the nation’s faculty are now overworked and underpaid contingent instructors with inadequate benefits and no job security. Educators’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions: job security is necessary to the freedom to teach and learn, and a living wage and reasonable workload are necessary to quality education. Colleges and universities need to be stable places to work as well as exciting places to learn, and all workers on our campuses deserve fair pay and better working conditions.

**We Stand for Democracy within Higher Education**

Educators, researchers, staff, students, and community members must have a meaningful collective voice in the governance of colleges and universities. Attacks on entire areas of study, attempts to roll back policies supporting diversity, the defunding of research and teaching, the suppression of protest, the transformation of universities into tools of financial speculation and into real estate developers displacing local communities, and the imposition of crushing debt on students undermine and render meaningless existing structures of shared governance. State legislatures from Florida to Indiana have taken aim at public universities as part of a broader assault on U.S. democracy. At private universities, unelected trustees, billionaires, and administrators increasingly exercise unilateral power to dictate policies and academic priorities. We stand against these antidemocratic pressures in all their guises.

**We Stand Together**

We call on all members of the higher education community across the country to engage in collective action for higher education in the public interest. We stand in solidarity with all who are organizing unions, AAUP chapters, and student organizations to win the conditions that make teaching, learning, and research possible.

**On April 17, we will mobilize for these goals on campuses nationwide. Our struggles are linked, and so are our futures. On this national day of action and beyond, we commit to working together to build the universities and the democracy that our society needs and deserves.**

**Endorsed by:**

NYU-AAUP

University of Illinois Chicago United Faculty AAUP-AFT Local 6524

University of Washington-AAUP

George Mason University AAUP

United Academics of Oregon State University

Rutgers AAUP-AFT

Rutgers PTLFC-AAUP-AFT

University of Florida UFF-UF

UCSB Faculty Association  
Lebanon Valley College AAUP

University of Kentucky AAUP

AAUP-Penn

PA State Conference of the AAUP

Higher Ed Labor United

Franklin & Marshall College AAUP

UC Davis FJP  
Whitman College AAUP

UT Austin AAUP  
AAUP-Ohio State

University of Maryland AAUP

Cornell University Chapter of the AAUP  
Scholars for a New Deal for Higher Ed  
UC Irvine Faculty for Justice in Palestine

University of North Carolina at Greensboro AAUP  
Haverford College AAUP Organizing Collective