



ACTA
AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI

Board of Directors

John W. Altman, Chairman
Janice Rogers Brown
Heidi Ganahl
Paul S. Levy
Robert T. Lewit
Michael B. Poliakoff
Mark Ridenour
Karrin Taylor Robson
Stuart Taylor, Jr.
Stephen Joel Trachtenberg
Edwin D. Williamson

Anne D. Neal
Senior Fellow

Joshua T. Katz
Scholar-in-Residence

Council of Scholars

George E. Andrews
Pennsylvania State University

Mark Bauerlein
Emory University

Marc Zvi Brettler
Duke University

William Cook
SUNY–Geneseo

Paul Davies
William & Mary

David C. Doughty, Jr.
Christopher Newport University

Niall Ferguson
Stanford University

Sydney L. Gulick III
University of Maryland

Robert “KC” Johnson
CUNY–Brooklyn College

Joshua T. Katz
American Enterprise Institute

Anatoly M. Khazanov
University of Wisconsin

Alan Charles Kors
University of Pennsylvania

Jon D. Levenson
Harvard Divinity School

Molly Levine
Howard University

George R. Lucas, Jr.
U.S. Naval Academy

Joyce Lee Malcolm
George Mason University

Matthew A. Malkan
UCLA

Michael Podgursky
University of Missouri

James A. Sellers
Pennsylvania State University

May 23, 2023

Dear The State University of New York Board of Trustees:

I write to share with you the American Council of Trustees and Alumni’s (ACTA) concern regarding the University at Albany’s apparent reluctance to penalize student protesters for disrupting a student-sponsored event featuring conservative commentator Ian Haworth.

As you likely already are aware, UAlbany’s student chapter of Turning Point USA invited Mr. Haworth to speak in April. Protesters, at least some affiliated with UAlbany’s chapter of the Young Democratic Socialists of America, disrupted the event by screaming, chanting, cursing, and forming a conga line in the room. After an hour of protest, security escorted Mr. Haworth and students attending his speech to another room so that he could give a shortened version of his presentation.

I praise Michael Christakis, vice president for student affairs, and Samuel Caldwell, chief diversity officer and associate vice president for diversity and inclusion, for their April 7 statement affirming that UAlbany has a “constitutional obligation to protect speech” and that the institution “expect[s] members of our community to be able to voice their views in a manner that promotes dialogue and honors UAlbany’s commitment to freedom of expression.” I also applaud their recognition that “this is especially important when it involves speech that members of our community find offensive or objectionable, including debate and discourse of different or opposing perspectives.”

However, more must be done to demonstrate the university’s commitment to the free and open exchange of ideas. While the police arrested two protesters for “disorderly conduct” and for preventing administrators from performing necessary activities, the university’s reluctance to punish the rest of the students who violated the restrictions on harassment (Section 3.4) and disruptive conduct (Section 3.24) in the University at Albany’s *Community Rights & Responsibilities*, as well as section I.A.13 of the State University of New York’s Rules for the Maintenance of Public

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

1730 M Street NW, Suite 600 Washington, DC 20036

T (202) 467-6787; (888) ALUMNI-8 F (202) 867-6784 info@GoACTA.org GoACTA.org

May 23, 2023

Page 2

Order, potentially establishes a highly problematic precedent. Specifically, I encourage President Havidán Rodríguez and his delegated authorities, including Dr. Christakis, Dean of Students Clarence McNeill, and the Office of the Dean of Students and the Office of Community Standards, to punish those students who violated these codes of conduct. Pursuing disciplinary action would demonstrate that UAlbany truly believes, as claimed in the April 7 statement, that “disrupting an event—any event—is unacceptable” and that no one can “deny others the right to speak.”

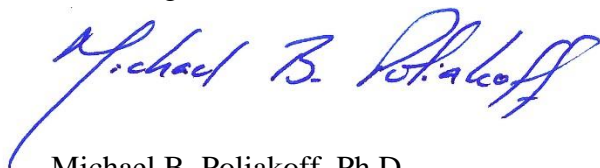
Indeed, it is the responsibility of university leadership to enforce these rules “when required or appropriate” (Rules for the Maintenance of Public Order, III.A.1). Identifying offending students would not be difficult, as video recordings of their actions are publicly available. The conduct system requires a “preponderance of evidence” for proof (*Community Rights & Responsibilities*, Section 4.1); these videos clearly demonstrate their lawless actions.

In light of recent events, I also would like to share with you the ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™. ACTA’s Gold Standard is a blueprint designed to help institutions of higher education commit to a culture of free expression, foster civil discourse, cultivate intellectual diversity, and advance leadership accountability. ACTA urges the University at Albany to express and affirm its dedication to debate and discussion of ideas—including controversial or unpleasant ones—and to take specific steps to promote these principles within the campus community.

If you would like additional information about the ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™, please contact **Steven McGuire**, ACTA’s Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom.

Thank you for your commitment to higher education.

Warm regards,



Michael B. Poliakoff, Ph.D.
President