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June 19, 2018

Dear Trustee:

Thank you for your service on the Evergreen State College Board of Trustees. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) appreciates the sacrifices board members make to ensure the integrity of America’s colleges and universities.

We also recognize the extremely difficult position your board has been placed in following last year’s protests. The reckless, disrespectful, and intolerant actions of a group of students, whose disruptive behavior was not properly contained and controlled by the administration, came to define the national conversation surrounding Evergreen State College. The nation witnessed students bullying and threatening a dedicated, long-serving professor because of his opinion, followed by the shameful scene of students holding President Bridges himself hostage in his office.

This is a moment to look at ways to prevent the recurrence of such behavior. **It is the board’s role and responsibility to ensure that the campus culture protects and fosters freedom of speech and viewpoint diversity.**

Although Evergreen has an admirable Social Contract that commits its community to the creation of an environment conducive to intellectual pluralism and academic freedom, it has failed to build a campus culture of free expression that prepares students for the robust dialogues that undergird a free society. President Obama himself stated that for minority students and other disparaged people to answer back to unwelcome viewpoints places “a slightly higher burden” on them, “But you’re not going to make the kinds of deep changes in society that those students want, without taking . . . on [your opponents] in a full and clear and courageous way.”

It is now ironic that in 2016 President Bridges wrote a piece for the *Seattle Times* which he titled “Why students need trigger warnings and safe places.” In it, he decried the nationally acclaimed commitment that the University of Chicago had made to the free exchange of ideas. He argued that this approach is “tone deaf,” citing that Evergreen is primarily composed of student groups that are usually underserved by higher education, who lack “experience in navigating college studies, [and] debating academic issues and ideas.” This approach puts Evergreen out of step with best practices, and it is urgent that Evergreen’s leadership follow

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

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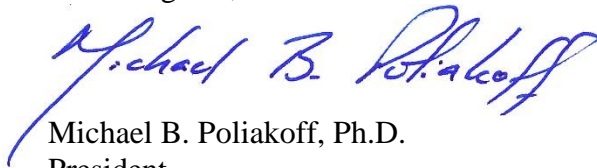
a more productive path. President Obama's advice would suggest that Evergreen's safe spaces and trigger warnings serve its minority students poorly.

I urge you to correct this unproductive situation by committing publicly and forcefully to the formation of a culture based around the principles espoused in the University of Chicago's 2015 Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression.

Purdue University provides a model that might be particularly appropriate for Evergreen at this turbulent time. The University incorporated the Chicago Principles into its orientation schedule by including a training program that clearly explains the university's policies on invited speakers and encouragement of free speech. More than 6,000 incoming students voluntarily attended the program, which featured a combination of video clips and student-performed skits inspired by events that had taken place at Purdue. We recommend that your board take similar steps to remind the campus community of the importance of maintaining a culture conducive to academic inquiry. As you navigate this important issue, please feel free to contact us.

Thank you for your service to higher education, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael B. Poliakoff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Michael B. Poliakoff, Ph.D.  
President

Enclosure

cc: Dr. George Bridges, Ph.D., president, Evergreen State College