Readers of The Daily Wire will be pleased to learn that not every university professor supports suppressing the speech of those who challenge political orthodoxy on campus. A letter from some of our colleagues at Arizona State University, addressed to one of the college deans, has widely circulated internally in recent days, condemning an upcoming campus event on February 8 featuring Dennis Prager with additional remarks from Charlie Kirk. We emphatically disagree with the sentiments contained in that letter.

One of the many things that distinguishes ASU from other top universities is our administration's embrace of intellectual diversity. ASU President Michael Crow has been especially vocal on this issue, urging that "we can and should learn from perspectives different from our own." In 2018, under President Crow's leadership, ASU formally adopted the Chicago Statement of Freedom of Expression, which states that "it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive." "Without a vibrant commitment to free and open inquiry," the statement concludes, "a university ceases to be a university."
President Crow’s commitment to intellectual diversity at ASU has been longstanding, including last year’s establishment of the Center for American Institutions, whose mission is fostering and renewing the nation’s political, economic, and social institutions, including religion and the family. Our speaker series in 2023 includes Katie Pavlich, Matt Walsh, Rosalind Ross (writer and director of “Father Stu”), Dr. Peter McCullough, Thomas Edsall, and Kimberley Strassel. Last year, we hosted Douglas Murray, James A. Lindsay, and Bret Weinstein.

Moreover, six years ago, President Crow launched the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership, which allowed for the appointment of faculty committed to a curriculum focused on the founding principles of American democracy and constitutionalism. He supported also the establishment of the T.W. Lewis Center for Personal Development, which is hosting the event now in question.

Though some ASU faculty have objected to these programs, students and Arizonans welcome hearing diverse views at a public university supported by their tuition fees and tax dollars. University students should rigorously and openly examine a variety of viewpoints. Yet study after study shows that the political and ideological affiliation of faculty nationwide does not bear even a close resemblance to those of the American public writ large.

Faculty letters like the one condemning Dennis Prager and Charlie Kirk reinforce campus conformity and function as a not-so-subtle way to intimidate and silence would-be dissenters among the faculty and student body. Many choose to self-censor out of fear of ostracization and even retribution. This is extraordinarily destructive to the free and open exchange of ideas.

The letter wildly describes Prager and Kirk as “two white nationalist provocateurs.” “Dennis Prager and Charlie Kirk are purveyors of hate who have publicly attacked women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, as well as the institutions of our democracy, including our public institutions of higher education,” the letter reads. “By platforming and legitimating their extreme anti-intellectual and anti-democratic views, [the college] will not be furthering the cause of democratic exchange at ASU, but undermining it in ways that could further marginalize the most vulnerable members of our community.”
In addition, while the letter states that students should “encounter a broad diversity of voices and viewpoints,” it is clear that among the ideas that are not to be tolerated are many mainline conservative or centrist viewpoints, including opinions supported by a majority of Americans.

The letter implies that any of the following views would render one unfit for speaking at a university:

- Dissenting from radical gender ideology
- Questioning the official lockdown narrative during COVID
- Questioning the soundness and efficacy of Big Pharma research and shots
- Thinking that a mother and father in the home is ideal for a child
- Encouraging young people to get married and have children
- Objecting to the methods and solutions of the BLM organization
- Questioning the hyper-racialist ideology of “anti-racism”
- Questioning the handling of particular elections (unless the wrong candidate wins, then it’s ok)
- Objecting to the exploitation and sacralization of January 6
- Challenging the presumption that in order to be happy and successful you MUST go to college

Such views, according to the letter, are “bigoted,” “anti-intellectual,” and “extreme.” The irony, of course, is that the most anti-intellectual position one could take is to demand a captive mind and universal conformity to a rigid and suffocating set of dogmatic precepts, and then to throw a fit if someone dare utter a contrary view. One need not agree with all or most of what Prager and Kirk believe in order to defend their opportunity to speak at a public institution and the opportunity of others to hear what they have to say.
“If liberty means anything at all,” said George Orwell, “it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

We are proud to research, teach, and serve at a university that champions free speech and open inquiry on campus, and we encourage ASU faculty of all views to publicly affirm their commitment to these cherished principles.

Lastly, a common strategy of anti-intellectuals is to label their opponents as having a phobia rather than dealing with the truth or falsity of their beliefs. Public debate allows both sides to be exposed to the light of reason. Those who oppose having heterodox speakers at ASU should be willing to defend their position in public debate. Professor Owen Anderson, philosophy, is putting out an open challenge for public debate about the necessity of a variety of viewpoints and values in the university.

Jonathan Barth is an Associate Professor of History at Arizona State University and Associate Director of the Center for American Institutions. He’s the author of “The Currency of Empire: Money and Power in English America in the Seventeenth Century” (Cornell University Press, 2021). His History of Money lecture series, as well as other educational content, is freely available on YouTube.

Donald Critchlow is a Professor of History at Arizona State University and Director of the Center for American Institutions. He’s the author of twelve books, including “In Defense of Populism: Protest and American Democracy” (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020) and “Republican Character: From Nixon to Reagan” (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

Owen Anderson is a Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Arizona State University. He has published books with Cambridge University Press about natural law, the American Founding, and the First Amendment. His other books include “The Clarity of God’s Existence.” He pastors the Historic Christian Church of Phoenix, a Reformed Church, and maintains an educational YouTube channel.