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Endangered Scholars Worldwide

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Endangered Scholars Worldwide

Attacks on higher education communities are occurring at an alarming rate worldwide, threatening the safety and well-being of scholars, students, and academic staff, as well as the autonomy of higher education institutions. While we continue to publish regular updates in *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, in response to a global increase in threats to academic freedom, Endangered Scholars Worldwide (ESW) has expanded its presence as an online publication under the auspices of the New University in Exile Consortium (<https://www.newuniversityinexileconsortium.org>), sharing frequent updates on news and developing cases in contribution to the Consortium's efforts to create a supportive intellectual community for threatened, exiled scholars.



For the most current information and ways in which you can be involved in our efforts to defend academic freedom and free expression, we invite you to visit our website <https://www.endangeredscholarsworldwide.net>.

If you are aware of a scholar or student whose case you believe we should investigate, please get in touch with us at esw@newschool.edu.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Quarterly Report

2025 was a tough and tumultuous year for many around the world and in the United States. Right-wing authoritarian regimes are increasing in number and targeting rights and liberties that have been taken for

granted for a long time, and academic freedom is facing the brunt of the attack. As US President Donald Trump completes the first year of his second term, American universities and colleges are suffering from a dramatic diversion of public funds from education and research, undue punishment of dissenting voices in academia, efforts to exert increased political-administrative control over the classroom, and more.


The office of US Senator for Vermont Bernie Sanders published a report on January 7, 2026, presenting findings on the impact of the first year of Trump's second term on the country's higher education. According to the report, titled *Trump's War on Free Speech*, the administration has cut a total of \$3 billion from federal higher education funding without congressional approval. Furthermore, the report finds that "at least 50 university faculty and staff have resigned, been fired for their views, or fled the US" since Trump's election, while at least 6,000 international students have had their visas revoked. A recent number shared by the US Department of State over social media is even higher, at around 8,000 student visa revocations.

In another recent report titled *Expanding the Web of Control: America's Censored Campuses 2025*, PEN America has described the situation as "a full-scale campaign against colleges and universities, with a concerted focus on speech." A key instrument in this campaign has been state-level legislation introducing limitations on classroom instruction, further administrative control over campus governance, new rules on hiring and promotions, and more. According to the report, the enactment in 2025 of 21 new pieces of legislation across 15 states that will "censor higher education," in addition to similar legislation passed in the last few years, means that more than half of all higher education students in the country are now studying in states that have at least one law or policy restricting "what can be taught or how campuses can operate."

A parallel development to the federal and state governments' attacks on higher education has been the increase of administrative

control over classroom instruction and campus governance. Texas is perhaps one of the most visible examples of this dynamic. A December 1, 2025, directive from Chancellor Brandon Creighton to instructors in the Texas Tech University System prohibits the “advocacy/promotion of race or sex-based prejudice” in the classroom by placing restrictions on specific ideas and arguments, some of which are not conventionally understood as racist or sexist, such as, for example, that “individuals bear responsibility or guilt for actions of others of the same race or sex.” The directive also requires instructors to follow the state’s official recognition of only two sexes, male and female. Furthermore, the directive instructs teachers to put any material related to gender identity and sexual orientation through a newly created “course content review process” whereby the teaching of such material will be conditional upon approval by several administrators including faculty member’s department chair, the dean of their school, and the provost. At Texas A&M University’s College of Arts and Sciences, more than 200 courses have been “flagged or canceled by university leaders for gender- or race-related content as the university undertakes its review of all course syllabi” as part of a “system board–mandated course-review process,” according to *Inside Higher Ed*. A philosophy professor was told to remove Plato’s writings that discuss gender from the syllabus of his Contemporary Moral Problems class. Another class, a graduate course Ethics in Public Policy, was canceled by a dean on the grounds that the professor did not provide information about “when and how his class would address race, gender or sexuality.”

Administrators, in some cases, are also getting involved in the grading of student assignments by seemingly circumventing universities’ procedures. On December 22, 2025, a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Oklahoma was suspended and later removed from teaching duties for allegedly giving an unfair grade to a student. On January 15, 2026, American Association of University Professors (AAUP) president Todd Wolfson condemned the decision, stating that



grades and grade appeals should be determined by faculty and that “an administrative officer’s unilaterally changing a course grade originally assigned by the instructor of record” is unacceptable. The student disputing the grade had filed an appeal, but it was resolved in record time and without sufficient transparency, suggesting administrative interference. The AAUP also expressed concern about the university’s newly adopted practice of immediate suspension of instructors upon receiving a student complaint, which is contrary to long-established due process procedures.

Meanwhile, faculty continue to face retribution for their speech and activism. In November 2025, Sang Hea Kil, professor of justice studies, was fired from San José State University and became the first tenured professor to be fired from a public university in the US over pro-Palestinian activism since October 7, 2023. A faculty committee determined that Kil violated the university’s “time, manner, and place” protest regulations and professional responsibility standards for faculty but recommended against disciplinary action; the president of the university rejected the recommendation and terminated Kil. At Harvard University, Mary T. Bassett was asked to resign as the director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at the School of Public Health in December 2025. Her removal from the position follows months of public criticism of the center’s work on Palestine, such as their academic events on Palestinian human rights and public health, and partnership with the Palestinian Birzeit University. According to the school’s dean, Bassett’s removal will be accompanied with a shift of the center’s focus from “oppression, poverty, and stigma” toward “children’s health in early development.”

Endangered Scholars Worldwide condemns the ongoing attacks on US higher education and calls on the Trump administration as well as state and local elected officials to take the necessary steps to scale back increasing political and administrative control over university governance and classroom instruction. We invite the global community to join our call.