The Forum

May 2025 Your Albany Chapter Newsletter Issue 151

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60	Percent chance of a global recession according to J.P. Morgan
11	Estimated number of undocumented workers in the US (in millions)
$315	Estimate in Billions of dollars it would cost to deport them all
18	Estimated percentage of US GDP contributed by all immigrants according to Economic Policy Institute
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400	Arrests per 100,000 people for 'unathorized immigrants" in Texas, the only state to sort arrest data by immigration status, in 2018
1000	Arrests per 100,000 people for US Born Citizens in Texas in 2018
230,000	Total number of combined votes by which Trump won in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin
115,000	Number of additional votes Harris would have needed to flip these three states and win the election

Immigration Statistics from

Economic Policy Institute

and the Migration Policy Institute

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Note: Because of what members describe as a persistent fear of retaliation and intimidation for voicing disagreement with the administration, we are printing most of our articles without attribution.

Viewpoint Diversity

As many of the articles in this issue indicate, we are at a crisis point in higher education. The crisis has been years in the making. Austerity has decimated our campus and our ability to support our students. Most of us

are overworked and underpaid, with chronic under-staffing affecting nearly every office on campus. The actions of the Trump administration will only exacerbate these issues. And their reckless withholding of funds comes with a transparent attempt to impose a white supremacist ideology on institutions of higher learning.

This is why it was so heartening to see Harvard stand up to the Trump administration. Hopefully we will be able to look back at this moment as turning-point. If you have not done so already, it's worth reading Harvard's response to the Trump administration along with the original letter itself. I would like to focus here on one aspect of that laughably stupid, hubristic and internally contradictory original letter.

The letter, which amazingly offers to help Harvard, the most venerated institution in the United States, founded 100 years before the country itself, "restore its promise," spends considerable time counterpoising "merit" to diversity. It hardly needs the close reading skills of an English Professor to see the racism inherent in this idea: all "diverse" candidates—whether for admission or hiring—are considered, somehow, not to be meritorious. But alongside this racist critique of diversity comes a contradiction that would be amusing if it wasn't so pernicious:

> Harvard must abolish all criteria, preferences, and practices, . . . throughout its admissions and hiring practices, that function as ideological litmus tests. Every department or field found to lack viewpoint diversity must be reformed by hiring a critical mass of new faculty within that department or field who will provide viewpoint diversity.

Harvard must abandon all ideological litmus tests, except the ones the administration insists upon; an imaginary litmus test is replaced with a real one.

But I would like to focus on the idea of "viewpoint diversity," for it represents a fundamental misunderstanding of academic inquiry. Its watered down version is the requirement to "teach the controversy" or "represent both sides." Academia is under no obligation to do so because academia does not rest on the principle that all opinions deserve expression. Rather, academia is a community of scholars who through rigorous research, peer review and rational debate in the public sphere determine the validity of ideas and the boundaries of their disciplines. Ideas that are considered false are no longer debated or discussed. They are ruled out of bounds. There is no requirement, for instance, for a department of Atmospheric Sciences to hire a climate change denier to represent "diversity." Climate change denial, within the discipline of Atmospheric Sciences, does not count as a viewpoint. It is simply wrong. Geography departments, similarly, need not hire flat-earthers, nor does the Biology department need a phrenologist.

Universities pursue the free exchange of ideas but they rest, fundamentally, on expertise. Any University that gives up this idea—that allows crackpot ideas and outdated notions to flourish—has given up on its core commitment: the pursuit not of expression but of the production of knowledge.

Do not be fooled by the seemingly common sense idea of viewpoint diversity. It is simply a cover for ideological control, an attempt to assert a set of ideas that educated people have long rejected. This, ultimately, is at the heart of the war on education. The administration does not like institutions of higher education because, at their best, they produce an educated citizenry critical of the world around it, one that roundly rejects the outdated and racist ideologies Trump and his ilk promote. In order to fulfill this mission, then, we must resist these incursions at every turn.

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Shared Governance

Austerity U:
The actions being taken at the federal level represent an unprecedented assault on higher education, one that could drastically impact the budget of NY State and, therefore, our campus. The list of potential threats to our funding is seemingly endless: a precipitous drop in international students, a loss of direct aid to states, a loss of federal grant dollars along with cuts to Medicaid that would take an enormous chunk out of the state budget. There is, of course, an obvious solution to any funding shortfalls at the state level: increased tax revenue. UUP has long advocated for higher tax rates on millionaire's and for the return of the stock transfer tax. History suggests the state will, instead, institute budget cuts.

What would that mean for us here at the University at Albany? What programs might be endangered if a new round of austerity hits the SUNY system? What new forms of reorganization might the administration undertake to save money and how can we, as unionists, respond to these challenges?

The most obvious answer is through strong participation in shared governance. But it is important to understand the state of shared governance on campus. We return, then, to this issue not merely to rehash old business, but rather to suggest that a clear-eyed understanding of recent history can guide our actions in the present.

Shared Governance:
In 2021, the University Senate, as a response to the administration's unilateral merger of the School of Criminal Justice with Rockefeller College, convened an ad-hoc committee to review shared governance on campus.

That document outlines what it calls the "locus classicus of shared governance" in a 1996 statement from the AAUP:

> The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process. [In 2002, student admissions standards was added to this enumeration of areas —TDS.] On these matters the power of review or final decision lodged in the governing board or delegated by it to the president should be exercised adversely only in exceptional circumstances, and for reasons communicated to the faculty. It is desirable that the faculty should, following such communication, have opportunity for further consideration and further transmittal of its views to the president or board. Budgets, personnel limitations, the time element, and the policies of other groups, bodies, and agencies having jurisdiction over the institution may set limits to realization of faculty advice.

Traditionally, at the University at Albany, faculty have been understood to have a more limited role, one that is seen as advisory. But as that report also noted our own website reveals considerable ambiguity about this role. Consider the two issues of "Creation, renaming, reorganization, dissolution of academic units or programs" and "Educational Programs & Curriculum." The Administration "determines" the first and "consults" on the latter, with the roles reversed for the faculty. But where exactly is the line between the "reorganization and dissolution of academic units or programs" and the "educational curriculum"? Is not a reorganized unit likely to result in distinct educational curricula? And if not, what is the point of the reorganization in the first place?

It is precisely this gray area that is at stake in any conversation about shared governance. The administration, at every turn, asserts its role over

this grey area. Faculty have typically been reluctant to do so. However, faced with an administration with a penchant for re-organization—the aforementioned Criminal Justice merger, the combination of African Studies and LACS, largely against the will of those members, and the creation of the Integrated Sciences College, which proceeding mostly by ignoring the concerns of the School of Social Welfare—the University Senate unanimously passed a resolution in October of 2023 affirming not only that reorganizations are indeed matters for faculty consultation but also that, in line with the AAUP document quoted above, the administration has a responsibility to communicate its plans to the faculty and to respond when it rejects the faculty's advice.

That resolution began by quoting the Faculty Bylaws, which state that "Formal consultation is required for matters covered by Article 1, Section 2.2.2 … Formal consultation shall require communication, preferably in writing, specifying the area or issue for which recommendations are being solicited and accompanied by sufficient information as necessary for an informed recommendation. . . . The faculty shall be given adequate time to respond. A written response to final Faculty recommendations shall be provided, indicating what decisions were made and the basis for such decisions; this should be particularly detailed in instances where faculty recommendations are not followed." Unfortunately this did not occur, as the document noted: "The Provost subsequently announced that the merger was going forward, but failed to address specific concerns of faculty cited in the letters or report, with the exception of beginning another year-long consultation process." The Resolution then goes on to state that "the administration has an obligation to submit written plans to the relevant Senate councils and committees to justify any such significant curricular and administrative restructuring process and account for the significant faculty concerns that have already been articulated." Finally, this written plan should be subject to "a formal vote to approve or disapprove any significant curricular changes."

This resolution was then followed by a Report from Senate Representatives to SSW-SPH Working Groups, delivered to the March 2024 Senate meeting, which, after outlining various problems with the consultation process concluded with a clear call for further consultation:

> We further believe that the best way to achieve this is a vote of affected faculty and staff, and preferably one that allows each School to vote separately on the proposal (given the differences in faculty and staff size). We believe that following a vote on the part of faculty and staff, the Senate should vote to endorse the outcome of the faculty and staff vote.

The Provost ignored these repeated calls to submit a plan for a formal Senate vote. Indeed, when the union asked at our Labor/Management meetings if the Provost planned to submit a proposal for the new college to the Senate, we were told no, again despite being asked to do so by her own Senate. The vote never happened, either at the college or Senate level.

It is important to recognize, then, that this administration not only does not believe it has to consult the Senate on any reorganizations of the university, but it explicitly refuses to do so even when the Senate passes resolutions stating that they should. It appears, at least at the University at Albany, that governance is not shared.

A Path Forward:

As we stated at the outset, we are not only trying to rehash past grievances. The new college has been formed. At this point a written proposal is not helpful. However, as we face the uncertain budget landscape, we need to be thinking ahead about the ways that our university has managed past austerity projects and the ways this administration has claimed unilateral authority to restructure academic and

professional units. Now is the moment for UUP members involved in all levels of governance from the department to the university levels to vocally assert our role in making decisions about the structure and direction of the university.

One immediate place to act is the upcoming plan to revise the budget metrics. UUP met with nearly every academic department over the course of AY 24-25 and there was an almost universal rejection of the validity of these metrics. Two issues stood out the most: the first is the basic problem of comparing apples to oranges with one catch-all formula. Some departments are better at getting grants; others perform lots of service but have low majors; others do tons of work cultivating alumni relations and donations. But these inputs, if they even exist at all, are weighted the same for all units, which disadvantages some departments and creates advantages for others. The second is, perhaps, more obvious: the budget metrics do not account for new programs, which is where almost all of the limited resources the Provost has to spend on new hiring comes from. The allocation of lines—the stated justification for the metrics—seems to occur regardless of whatever information the metrics spit out. Members were happy to critique these metrics in our meetings. Now that critique needs to be public.

But it is also important that any potential budget cuts not be used as an excuse to close or shutter programs on campus. As during COVID, when we called on the administration to do whatever it could to avoid retrenchment and mass layoffs, we make a similar call now. We need, instead, to think creatively about ways to support our members on campus and the work that they do and we need to advocate, together, for full funding for higher education, now more than ever.

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Labor Management Digest AY 24-25:

(note: In keeping with the practice of other chapters, initiated here last year, we present a summary of our Labor/Managment meetings over the last year. Detailed notes can be found here).

September 2024: At our first meeting in the Fall we asked the Provost if she would restore travel funds to the University for its academics. She said no. We also asked a series of questions about the CAS review, including the seemingly anomalous response to the problems of this vastly under-resourced college with the creation of three associate dean positions. We were told that these positions are necessary to create detailed plans for the college. We spent time, once again, describing the fallacies in the O'Leary memo as well as the new "workload bucket" outline on the Provost's website, which fails to account for service in its model of professional obligation.

We also asked a series of questions about Health & Safety, particularly as the coolers had malfunctioned during the summer. We were assured that processes were in place to update these systems.

October 2024: The President attended this meeting. We asked again about travel funds and he agreed to provide them. More than a half year later, we still await details. The chapter renewed its critique of the SIRFs, which have well-known biases against women, minorities, general education courses and, therefore, adjuncts. We pressed the University to abandon SIRFs or at least de-emphasize them. The University promised a review of their place in the evaluation of academic faculty.

The chapter requested data on the use of extra service pay for courses. The goal here is not to limit professional faculty's ability to teach these courses. Rather we want to make sure departments are not consistently

relying on extra service for courses when they should, instead, be hiring tenure-line faculty, orr providing sufficient

courses to ensure regular employment and health benefits to current part time contingent faculty. We also asked for data on non-renewals, though we have yet to receive any.

Finally, we began to address the issue of overwork in our professional offices by issuing a demand to negotiate over workload. We await the next steps in this formal process that allows us to address what we feel are significant workload increases across campus.

November 2024: We asked the University to include UUP service on the Faculty Activity Report but they declined.

We also began what would become a year-long inquiry into the Honors College's recent hiring of three new lecturers. This seems to us to violate the whole point of the Honors College, which is to put students in touch with tenure-line faculty from the beginning of their college career. We were told this is not the case. We were also told that these hires were because the Honors College was having difficulty getting tenure-line faculty from departments to teach Honors Courses. We pointed out the reason departments don't send tenure-line faculty to teach in the Honors College is because they need all their tenure-line faculty to staff their own courses. The administration did not seem to know this. Transparently, then, we have an enrollment need that somehow is not resulting in Tenure-line hires. What became clear here—and was eventually stated directly by management—was that the administration is only authorizing VAP and adjunct lines until they prove they can bring in money. More importantly, though, we see here that the oft-stated claim that enrollments will drive hires is false.

In **December** we had a productive discussion—the first of many—in anticipation of the Trump administration's assaults on DEI, on trans, queer and non-binary students and members, on international students and on academic freedom. The University made it clear that they are following guidance from the Chancellor's office. At all of these meetings, we have pressed the University to make more full-throated public statements of supports for its students and employees.

Throughout the year, we also were made aware of a handful of irregularities in payments for members. In all cases, these impacted only a handful of members, who were made whole and in each case, HR instituted processes of review to catch the errors ahead of time.

The President came to our **February** meeting. We emphasized problems with the diversity of our workforce, which falls well below national and regional averages. We also pointed out that supporting diversity means not only hiring diverse employees but also supporting those disciplines that teach diversity as their subject matter.

We began a discussion about the new performance program documents. The goal of these documents is to create a more robust and consultative process for our professional members. This will, of course, require more work from supervisors, but it is necessary work.

Some miscommunication resulted in the (mistaken) belief that the documents had been finalized. They are only a pilot. As the conversation developed over the year, two things became clear. 1) There was a false sense that the documents asked multiple people to assess the member's performance. This is not the case and any ambiguous language has been revised. 2) Members are concerned about the seven point scaled used to evaluate their work. In particular, they resist the idea of being reduced to a number (a parallel to the critique of SIRFs and the over-reliance on a

number to evaluate a complicated multi-faceted performance). We will continue these negotiations with member concerns at the forefront.

We continued to press the administration to give our adjuncts timely appointment letters. Some of the holdup comes from departments themselves, but all agreed this process has to be improved.

Our **March** meeting saw us continue the discussion of the Honors College as well as the unfolding situation with the federal government. We also raised questions about the temperatures in the podium buildings which often exceed (or fall below) acceptable temperatures for work. Many offices, for instance, consistently run space heaters to get the temperatures up to appropriate levels. We were told that they are working on this problem.

In **April**, again asking for updates about the federal situation, we told management that we believe our members are hungry for more forceful, public support from the administration. We were dismayed that UUP is considered an "outside organization" and was forced to hold a rally in the back corner of the campus. The guidance seemed to be coming from SUNY Central and so we filled an Improper Practice charge of union interference against the administration for its actions.

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They Will Come for You Anyway
Elliot Tetrault

In my undergraduate Queer Theory class, the students and I write about our rage and fear. The materials are flimsy (off-brand sticky papers that keep falling off the classroom wall, Sharpies unearthed from my bag), but the anger is forceful, especially for transgender, nonbinary, intersex, and

gender-expansive students, as they are among the populations most targeted by the current presidential administration's agenda. This is even more the case for any trans students who are also Black or Brown, international students or from immigrant families, and for those with disabilities. Students who do not share any of these experiences are still enraged that they live in a nation capable of such stunning cruelty. Though oppression in the U.S. is foundational and far from new, the agenda being championed by those in power today is especially threatening and wide-reaching. This agenda was designed by a powerful coalition uniting the wealth-hoarding interests of the billionaire class; the white Christian nationalist, heteropatriarchal goals of Project 2025; and the ambitions of the tech industry, which rely on increased automation and the exploitation of labor and natural resources. Together, these groups constitute an aspiring authoritarian regime. The oppression of the many for the benefit of the few—already the condition of daily life in the U.S. for more people than not, but now made even more widespread and severe—is the bottom line of this policy platform.

Historically, the construction and enforcement of a strict man/woman binary gender system has always been a feature of authoritarianism and other high-control systems for organizing society, which seek to restrict the bodily and imaginative autonomy of the population. We can see examples of this connection between authoritarianism and gender in several 20th and 21st century contexts, from the Nazi persecution of queer and trans people and destruction of knowledge (such as the looting and burning of the library of the Institute for Sexual Science in 1930s Berlin) to the anti-LGBTQ policies recently signed into law in Hungary by the right-wing populist government of Viktor Orbán (for whom the current U.S. president and vice president have expressed open admiration). In contrast, societies with greater freedom and respect for life, such as many Indigenous societies, have usually embraced gender expansiveness and fluidity. Contemporary disinformation attacks by aspiring authoritarians frame 21st

century transgender people as a new phenomenon, but this is historically and scientifically false. In reality, a hierarchical gender binary is actually the more recent invention, based not in "biology" but in an agenda of domination and control. Overall, how a society thinks about gender is a good bellwether for the degree of autonomy its general population has or does not have. In our current society, we see this autonomy being constrained more and more, with trans people used as a test case for restricting the broader population's ability to make choices about their bodies (including cisgender women, whom the current administration attempts to pit against trans women but whose bodily autonomy will be attacked through the same mechanisms that deny trans people access to life-saving medical care).

In our basement classroom, the students know all of this but feel largely powerless. Their humanities education has given them the rare ability to contextualize recent events in a longer historical trajectory, to analyze how systems of power work together, to critique the workings of these systems, and to understand their impacts on various populations. However, decades of cuts to the very same disciplines that teach these skills mean these smart students are in the minority and are often made to feel they are screaming into a void, including by their own educational institution. Trans people face violence in multiple forms, including what philosophers have termed epistemic violence: harm done to a person in their capacity as a knower. This violence is enacted against trans people not only by right-wing attacks on their self-knowledge and ability to make informed choices, but also by liberal media outlets' and politicians' ready capitulation on trans issues. In this way, the right gets to control the narrative and set the terms for debate, circulating claims that are not based on history, science, or anything else other than an animus-fueled agenda. Trans people are forced to argue for our existence on the narrow terms set by those in power, often denied the chance to discuss the infinitely more varied, interesting, and imaginative dimensions of trans experience. A Queer Theory class in a

basement is one of the only opportunities trans students have to do this, and they fear that this too could be taken away in the next round of budget cuts—a fear that I share as their already exhausted queer and trans professor.

In addition to these threats, trans students are angry and afraid that their lives will be even more precarious and punishing than they had already feared. They are afraid of losing or never even gaining access to healthcare; of forced detransition; of jobs in their chosen fields vanishing (many seek to enter education, nonprofits, social services, and other industries that rely on funding that this administration is seeking to eliminate or hoping to automate out of existence); of a lifetime of debt; of facing poverty and becoming unhoused (especially because it is common for queer and trans young adults not to have supportive families to fall back on); of losing the few affirming community spaces they have access to; of being targeted for persecution; of incarceration, deportation, and disappearance. I wish I could tell them their fears are unfounded but I do not want to be another authority figure who lies to them. I tell them instead that queer and trans people have always found each other, cared for each other, and that some of us have survived. Our rage solidifies most forcefully around this fact: none of it has to be this way. Queerness teaches us to see the structures and norms of our society not as inevitable, but as the result of people making choices, and to imagine otherwise. But all that knowledge and imagination can be cold comfort when we stand alone and unheard.

If you are reading this and wondering what you can do, my first suggestion is to follow news, analysis, and action items about trans issues by trans people. I suggest the work of Erin Reed (https://www.erininthemorning.com/), TransLash (https://translash.org), and Assigned Media (https://www.assignedmedia.org/) as places to start. Stay up to date on anti-LGBTQ legislation with the Trans Legislation

Tracker (https://translegislation.com/) and the ACLU (https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights-2025). Follow trans people's lead on when to speak up and when to exercise discretion. In New York, queer and trans people have more protections than in other states because of the advocacy of many LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations, but if our current political moment can teach us anything, it is how quickly the legal protections that some of us took for granted can be stripped away or ignored by those in power. These protections must be maintained and continually fought for. Learn to recognize anti-trans disinformation and how to fight it (including when not to engage with disinformation, as doing so can actually broaden its reach); I recommend the Trans Justice Project's Anti-Trans Disinformation Handbook (https://commonslibrary.org/the-anti-trans-disinformation-handbook/). Learn about how anti-transness is not an isolated issue but is deeply connected to white supremacy, ableism, and other intersecting systems of power that impact us all. Read *A Short History of Transmisogyny* by Jules Gill-Peterson to learn some of these histories. Understand that being an ally to trans people right now goes far beyond using the right pronouns or pointing out where the gender-neutral bathroom is. Trans people aren't thinking about pronouns right now; we're thinking about life or death. Overall, do not accept the premise that trans existence is debatable or that sacrificing trans lives and trans knowledge is a justifiable political compromise. They will come for you anyway. Solidarity is the only way forward.

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In Memoriam: Dr. Stephanie Hassan Richardson

Laura Wilder

UUP and UAlbany have lost a valuable member too, too soon. Stephanie Hassan-Richardson passed away after an aggressive illness on October 28, 2024. Dr. Hassan-Richardson was a graduate of UAlbany's doctoral

program in English. She taught writing at several institutions before returning in 2022 to direct UAlbany's Program in Writing and Critical Inquiry, taking the program's baton of leadership from Dr. Robert Yagelski, who had been Stephanie's mentor and dissertation director.

I had the privilege of meeting Stephanie late in the process of her dissertation work and joining her committee. I learned so much from her and her dissertation, titled "Composition Pedagogy for the 21st Century: A Culturally Inclusive Model." Stephanie's dissertation brought together disparate strands of theory and pedagogy with the ultimate goal of producing a practical guide for instructors interested in fostering a way to teach writing that is culturally inclusive and values the voices, languages, and rhetorical traditions that all students bring to a writing classroom (you can make that any classroom).

Stephanie's work belongs in a blossoming tradition of writing studies scholarship that helps make abundantly clear that diverse rhetorical and linguistic traditions are cultural traditions. If we value cultural diversity in our classrooms, then we should value linguistic and rhetorical diversity, too. This means valuing difference in ways of speaking and writing. Rather than eradicate this difference, Stephanie called on us to celebrate it and help students see their rhetorical and linguistic inheritance is one of wealth and value. Her work and the work of the scholars she cites, such as Keith Gilyard, Adam Banks, and Geneva Smitherman, help us understand this wealth.

My own teaching has been changed by my learning from Stephanie. Yes, I was a faculty member on her dissertation committee, but there really are times when the teacher becomes the student, and those are such deeply meaningful times. After working with and learning from Stephanie, I have come to think of the social justice mission of her work as a scholar, teacher, and writing program administrator as valuing the language everyone's earliest caregivers cooed into their ears. Whatever language or

dialect used by the person holding infant you in their arms while feeding you milk, that is a language and dialect worthy of celebration and worthy of respect in the academy. The tacit policy of linguistic and rhetorical accommodation, demanding some of us code switch to work with those of us who have the luxury, through the accidents and injustices of history, of not needing to juggle that great linguistic and cognitive burden, is unjust.

The kind of culturally inclusive writing pedagogy Stephanie advocated so fiercely for addresses an invisible yet profound barrier to true equality. UAlbany's students were fortunate to have Stephanie here to begin planting the seeds for supporting this pedagogy. Her colleagues in WCI now carry on this work, especially in their committee on Antiracism and Intersectional Justice and now in the Dr. Stephanie Hassan Richardson award for campus DEI initiatives, whose first recipients are Dr. Carmen Serrano and Dr. Elizabeth Vasquez, colleagues in the BiPOC faculty group who were so helpful and welcoming to Stephanie. Many of us will miss Stephanie greatly and are grieving losing her, even those who just got to know her in the last two years.

It is no joke to say teaching writing faces a great many challenges right now. The challenges of teaching writing in culturally inclusive ways are challenges I will continue to readily embrace, even as they humble me and continue to make me more the student than the teacher.

For this, I have Stephanie and her work to thank.

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Political Activism

Taking part in April 5th's national day of resistance to the Trump Administration's efforts to destroy what little social protections we have left

gave me a sense of hope after weeks that produced one reason for despair after another. And yet, as widespread, large, and noisy as those protests were, they were not enough to overcome my sense that, compared to where we were just six or seven months ago, things are pretty quiet.

Organized resistance takes time to build but if we lean on that truism too hard then we'll never grapple with the fact that many of the institutions that we rely on to provide space for movement building—key among them being college and university campus—worked very hard in the spring and fall of 2024 to break social movements and make it so much harder to rebuild them. The Trump Administration did not have to work around, or break, the resistance to his horrendous policy agenda during his first two months in office: the leaders of the country's colleges and universities had already done that for him.

I've been mulling over this thought since coming across an insightful post written by the political scientist Alex Gourevitch in late February of this year. Gourevitch studies the history of American social movements and he observed that at the height of the student mobilization against the Vietnam War in the 1960s, a movement that drew in millions of protestors, roughly 4,000 students were arrested. Anyone who participated in those protests, or anyone who has read about them, watched movies about them, or otherwise been exposed to them knows that these protestors were not treated gently.

Using data gathered by reporters at the New York Times, Gourevitch goes on to note that in the spring and fall of 2024, roughly 3,100 students were arrested on college campuses even though those protests and mobilizations were orders of magnitude smaller, and many months shorter-lived, than the mobilization against the Vietnam War. In other words, if stories of armed police cracking heads at Columbia University in 1968 gives you chills, it was a relatively localized display of represssive violence

compared to the all-out assault on student activism that took place on college campuses across the country last fall.

I think the point that Gourevitch is making here is important. We may think that campus repression of student protests last year was just par for the course. These are, after all, institutions led by elites who prioritize order, decorum and the reputation of their campus in the eyes of wealthy donors over supporting basic political rights. But last year was not just "par for the course." It was repression of free speech on a scale and scope that we have not seen in decades.

As we may recall, those campus crackdowns came as a result of Congressional Republicans dragging the presidents of elite colleges and universities to Washington for a grilling. After giving tepid defenses of free speech and the right to assembly and protest, those leaders (the ones who kept their jobs) returned to work with a mission to get their houses in order. Other campus leaders followed suit, hoping that by showing their commitment to order that they would keep their institution out of the Right's crosshairs. SUNY was no exception. With the support of Chancellor John King, police were sent into SUNY Purchase and SUNY New Paltz to break up student encampments. Many other campuses, like our own, never had those encampments materialize and so never had to make that call, but their leadership made it very clear to students that any protest that fell outside of the incredibly narrow bounds that they confined free speech to would be met with severe reprisals.

This repression of political activism did real harm to the activists swept up in it. It also did long-lasting damage to our collective capacity to resist the assaults coming from the Right. When students and faculty returned to campus this past spring they were immediately greeted by Trump's executive orders to defund higher education. As bad as those cuts have been, and as bad as they can still get, they pale in comparison to the total

decimation of public higher education that will occur if the Right's proposed cuts to Medicaid are passed.

In these moments the best defense that higher education has is a mobilized body of students, faculty and community supporters that have already gone through the growing pains of early organizing and is ready to resist. This is how some of the most powerful organized resistance to the Vietnam War happened. One of the key forces in that movement was Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS, which began as a free speech movement at Berkeley. Its early activism was chaotic and reactive but through these initial struggles the movement learned how to become better organized, how to choose its tactics for both the long term and the short term so that when it came time to struggle against the U.S. War against Vietnam, they could do so with great effect.

This is how resistance works. It needs time and space to develop, to go through false starts and missteps, to learn how to build on successes and build power in coalition with others. None of that work is easy, or neat, or quiet, but it is necessary.

The leaders of our colleges and universities have failed to learn their lesson from last year. They tried capitulation and pre-compliance and all it got them was a totalitarian megalomaniac who has only increased the assault on higher education. In response, most college presidents and political leaders have doubled-down on this failed strategy. Columbia University actively aiding ICE agents to detain a lawful U.S. resident for engaging in basic political speech. Governor Hochul forcing CUNY to cancel a search for two Palestinian Studies Scholars. These are just two local examples that come quickly to mind. As the New York Times reported on March 25th, campuses across the country have increased their use of quick arrests, surveillance drones, and harsh disciplinary policies against student activists out of some illogical hope that, this time, they will be spared.

The effect of all this is precisely what you would expect. Yes, there are pockets of courageous activism out there, but compared to the threat that we are now facing, things are pretty quiet. No international student will risk even being photographed near a political protest out of genuine fear that it will get them sent to indefinite ICE detainment. In some of the groups that I am part of that are trying to organize a national resistance to Trump's attack on higher education, seasoned and committed activists are asking for strategies and tactics that do not require mobilizing on their college campuses out of fear of reprisals. Trump wants to impose his agenda free of any interference. The leaders of our colleges and universities are helping him do just that.

The tide may be turning on this. In mid-April we finally saw Harvard University, and then Columbia, say no to the outrageous demands being placed on it. But real, long-lasting damage has been done and higher education leaders need to do a lot more. For one, they need to publicly and clearly acknowledge that their assault on peaceful protest in 2024 was morally wrong and a strategic mistake. Campus activists are owed an apology and a meaningful process of reconciliation.

But more than this, college and university presidents and other senior administrators need to work with campus activists in open dialogue to craft policies that make it possible for colleges and universities to do the work of teaching and research while affording as much space as possible to political activism. This should include a re-writing of campus discipline policies to make it clear that no student will be expelled or otherwise have their academic progress jeopardized simply for participating in political activity on campus.

I don't expect the leaders of colleges and universities to take the lead in the resistance movement that we need. We don't need them to. But we do

need them to stop doing Trump's repression for him and we do need them to loudly and publicly affirm that colleges and universities are places where political activism can take root and flourish.

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HELU—Building Higher Ed Alternatives in a Time of Crisis

As chronicled in *The Forum* for years, higher education has been in a protracted state of crisis, characterized, most visibly, by declining state investment, the twin epidemics of student debt and contingent labor, and a rising anti-intellectual common-sense. Over a period of several decades this crisis has transformed the conception of higher education—its mission, its efficacy, its accessibility, its priorities—within universities themselves as well as in the public more broadly. Today, however, US higher education faces attacks from the federal government of unprecedented speed, scope, ambition, and inhumanity: cuts to federal research monies, the seizure and deportation of international students, the shuddering of DEI programs, the assault on trans, intersex and non-binary people and knowledge, the proposed cuts to Medicaid which will necessarily decimate state budgets and higher ed funding, the disregard for first amendment protections for political speech and academic freedom, the defunding of individual universities, to name just the most obvious few. Taken together these attacks threaten the very existence of US universities as we have known them.

We, of course, believe unions and the idea of collective action from higher education workers provide the only plausible bulwark in defense of the university, and, more ambitiously still, its re-envisioning. One of the few bright spots in these dark times, therefore, has been the emergence of

Higher Education Labor United (HELU), a coalition of higher ed unions, trying to build power among workers across the higher ed sector with a "wall to wall" and "coast to coast to coast" vision of organizing. UUP is a HELU member union, along with more than fifty other higher ed locals, including units that represent grad workers, professional staff, contingent employees, tenure-line faculty, healthcare workers, service and maintenance workers. HELU's membership also spans locals from at least eleven international unions (itself a sign of the internal fragmentation of higher ed labor that must be overcome to build a united sector-wide labor movement): AAUP, AFGE, AFSCME, AFT, CWA, UAW, OPEIU, NEA, UE, Unite HERE, and SEIU. Grounded in a model of rank-and-file organizing, escalating labor militancy, and cross-union solidarity, HELU is helping to assert a new vision for higher education from the perspective of its workers—those of us who make universities run. UUP is committed to the HELU project and has been a leading actor in HELU's development. Carolyn Kube, Statewide VP for Professionals, and Bret Benjamin both sit on HELU's Steering Committee, and many UUP members serve on HELU's committees.

HELU has launched a range of ambitious projects. In the lead-up to last November's presidential election, HELU facilitated a multi-union statement of unity signed by the presidents of AAUP, AFSCME, AFT, CWA, UAW, OPEIU, NEA, UE, Unite HERE, SEIU). More important than the content of statement itself is the fact that, for the first time in recent memory, the international unions that represent higher ed workers across the US began to act in coordination to foreground the concerns around higher education. This cross-union collaboration was made possible through HELU's leadership and it has been in part through HELU's activism that a number of these international unions have begun to place greater emphasis on, and devote more resources to, higher education struggles in recent months.

Building on this multi-union higher ed alliance, HELU has been a leading force in the development of the Labor4HigherEd coalition in partnership with many of the same international unions. In this case, however, the dynamism has come from locals that have organized coordinated mass actions under the joint slogans "Kill the Cuts" and "Trump's Cuts Kill," foregrounding the dire social consequences of federal cuts to science, medical, and research funding. On February 19 roughly 15 locals organized actions across the country. UUP members from our Chapter joined with the Federal Unionist Network to protest the federal cuts and the firing of federal workers at the Leo O'Brien Building in downtown Albany. On April 8, over 50 actions took place, including a rally on our UA campus (in which the university shamefully characterized UUP as an external group, relegating us to a back-lot "free speech zone"). On April 17, as I write, roughly 175 actions, including many on UUP-represented campuses, are taking place as part of the day of action called by HELU-partner, the Coalition for Action In Higher Education. HELU's role in coordinating, supporting, and publicizing these mass actions with locals across the country represents one visible element in its efforts to escalate a coordinated multi-union response to the many-sided crisis facing higher ed.

Beyond mass public actions, HELU has been working to build other forms of organizing capacity and coordination between and among higher ed locals. HELU has initiated local and regional collaborations in Philadelphia, Arizona, Oregon, Michigan, and here in the Northeast among the public sector higher ed unions representing workers from SUNY, CUNY, UMass, and Rutgers. These organizing initiatives bring together union leaders and rank-and-file members to help launch electoral and legislative initiatives including campaigns to increase state higher ed funding. They also aim to develop coordinated collective bargaining campaigns, as well as to create durable structures for joint solidarity actions. HELU sees these local and regional initiatives as ways to break down the fragmentation of higher ed workers, build organizing capacity in locals, advance political initiatives and

work—as a higher ed labor movement—to create an alternative vision for the future higher education.

As UUP members, we are already affiliated with HELU, and as I mentioned, UUP has been an enthusiastic contributor to shaping HELU's project. HELU regularly hosts events, shares information about urgent higher ed labor struggles (strike funds, letter campaigns, solidarity actions), and builds resources to help educate and coordinate the fight for a university that works as a public good. To get mailings and information about events, sign up here. The only possible antidote to the crisis of higher ed will be radical solidarity among higher ed workers, students, and a broader public. Such solidarity does not fall, ready made, from the sky; it must be built through creative and persistent organizing. HELU remains a fledgling organization, but its project is both ambitious and necessary, and its early achievements are laudable. I hope you will contribute to its growth and direction through your participation.

* * *

Addressing Moral Injury at the University at Albany

Loretta Pyles, Heather Horton, and Heather Larkin, faculty in the School of Social Welfare

Moral injury is a term gaining traction in research on institutional environments in recent years. It is generally assumed to result from exposure to events that involve either perpetrating or witnessing actions that violate one's core beliefs (Litz et al., 2009) or betrayal by a leader or trusted authority (Shay, 2014). In the case of public research universities like the University at Albany, the shifts in institutional missions have coincided with the rise of neoliberal ideology, which numerous scholars link to an increase in managerialism, accountability, and surveillance (Vazquez

& Levin, 2018), and what some scholars have identified as "fast academia" (Mountz, 2015).

On April 3rd in the Standish Room, about 20 faculty gathered to discuss their experiences with moral distress at the University at Albany. The overall objective was to break isolation by sharing stories, reflecting on impacts, and envisioning a different university. A Senate Forum co-sponsored by UUP, folks gathered from a range of academic and administrative departments. A case in point of structural disinvestment, we were not able to make the event hybrid because of lack of university employees assigned to provide IT support in that room. Fortunately, one of our planners agreed to convene a parallel Zoom event which created a space for a rich discussion for about 4 additional participants.

Designed as an interactive event, we distributed materials and readings prior to the meeting day. Participants were asked to submit their motivations for attending and their experiences with moral injury at UAlbany -- these responses kicked off the first large group discussion, setting an intentional and thoughtful tone to the work of unpacking our lived experiences. The large group discussion was followed by small breakout groups based on a focused reading list, article summaries, and prompts—stimulating conversation and self-reflection.

Key Findings and Reflections from Our Discussions

Participants' submissions prior to the event identified longstanding patterns of fragmentation, overwork, and disconnection at UAlbany that have intensified in recent years. Patterns included the erosion of institutional values and purpose, systemic undermining of faculty work, financial and career instability, hostile or inadequate institutional responses, moral dilemmas in student support, and concerns about university priorities and the political climate.

Several, if not all of these themes overlapped with ideas that emerged from the breakout groups, pointing to a reckoning with the gap between the academy's promise and its current reality. The following ideas emerged from the conversations:

1. Unsustainable Expectations and Systemic Overload

As is the case nationally, the pace of work continues to accelerate at UAlbany while support systems decline. Many described working in perpetual "emergency mode," with dissent against the situation often dismissed or even punished.

2. Isolation and Emotional Suppression

The erosion of informal, relational spaces has led to increased isolation. Many reported suppressing grief, anger, and vulnerability, which diminishes capacity for meaningful collaboration.

3. Power Imbalances and Institutional Betrayal

Top-down decision-making with little genuine engagement was a common concern. Particularly troubling was the disproportionate impact on caregivers, contingent faculty, and BIPOC colleagues who often experience cultural taxation, gaslighting, and inequitable opportunities.

4. Moral Injury from Witnessing Harm

Many expressed distress about complicity in systems that violate personal values, including watching students struggle under institutional burdens while feeling powerless to effect meaningful change.

5. Moral Injury Negatively Impacts Research

Participants concur with literature asserting that inadequate management of the emotional toll of research can have detrimental consequences for the researcher, research participants, and the research project itself.

Seeds of Renewal and Possibilities

Despite systemic challenges, participants expressed strong desires to integrate personal and professional identities, affirming that faculty, staff and students have the right to bring their whole selves to work without fear.

Participants identified concrete possibilities for moving forward, including:

- Cultivating spaces for informal connection, reflection, and relational repair

- Supporting wellness pedagogy and an ethics of care which involves caregiving, fostering nurturing relationships with others and oneself, and challenging inequality (Lawson 2007; Wood, Swanson, and Colley 2020)

- Countering fragmentation by acknowledging how life and work are intertwined

- Creating opportunities for bottom-up leadership, creativity, and presence

- Slowing down to restore meaning—including art, beauty, and shared visioning

Amid political backlash and economic constraints, participants articulated a longing for truth, a commitment to care, and a vision for an academy that values the whole person in the context of a whole community.

Moving Forward Together

As we continue exploring these issues, we remind UUP members that we can always share our experiences with chapter leadership in confidence. We can serve on committees addressing workload, institutional climate, and member well-being. Checking in with one another and sharing resources builds solidarity as does joining gatherings and taking collective action.

We are grateful for UUP's support, for everyone willing to participate, and for the planning committee which included: Loretta Pyles, Kate Coddington, Heather Horton, Heather Larkin, Barbara Sutton, Lani Jones, Lindsey Disney, Dawn Knight-Thomas, and Eric Hardiman.

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Part-Time to Full-Time Lecturer Conversion

"What is the union doing about this?" It is a question I get asked a lot, usually when someone has a problem. I love helping my fellow workers solve the problems they're having at work, either through bringing up the issue at Labor-Management meetings or ferreting out some piece of information from our collective bargaining agreement. It is important work that I am proud to do, but the premise of this question must be challenged. What is the union? It is the workers. What is the union doing? Whatever the workers set their minds to. That's how unions work. That's how your union works.

What is the union doing about the dozens of part time academics that do the work of a full-time lecturer but for a fraction of the pay? First, let's look

at the numbers. There are 158 part-time academics at UAlbany who drew their first paycheck on or before October of 2019 and who were on payroll last Fall. Some go as far back as 1974! We know that because years ago volunteer negotiators thought to demand hiring information from SUNY as part of state-wide contract negotiations. I emailed everyone on that list, asking if they were interested in going full time, or at least talking about the possibility. Some were semi-retired, or enjoyed a day job, and their part-time teaching was sufficient for them. But I did hear back from over two dozen people who wanted to go full time. That's when the real work began.

This project originated both from the union and the University Senate's Committee on Contingent Faculty (CCF) and the strategy has been years in the making: back in 2023 volunteer union negotiators in the last round of bargaining secured big increases to the per-course minimums, raising them from $3,750 to $6,000 by 2026. Not only does that put real money in our pockets, it changes the calculus for management by reducing the savings that accrue from keeping our members in part time status. Now we're in a better negotiation position at the campus level to secure benefits, longevity, and other protections for our members.

I was clear in my initial email to these part timers and in the two Zoom meetings we had afterward: there is no university-approved pathway for part time contingents to become full time lecturers. We would have to blaze that path together. The first step was collecting information about what our working conditions were like, what –if any– additional work we were willing to do to gain full-time status, and how the conversion process would be handled. From there Bret Benjamin and I wrote up a proposal and introduced it to our Chapter's executive committee for review. It was subsequently introduced, and endorsed, by the University Senate. Here's the highlights of the proposal:

- Anyone with five years of continuous service teaching at least six credits per semester for 8 of the last 10 semesters would qualify.

- Departments would establish their own criteria for the conversion process.

- Candidate review would be in two stages, first at the Department level, and then at the university level.

- Denials would have to be put in writing with reapplication options available.

As I write this, the proposal is circulating among Departments and individual part-timers for feedback and review. We have asked every academic department to discuss the proposal, identify any potential problems or conflicts that should be addressed, and build consensus across the university for a conversion process. Based on the feedback we have received so far, there is overwhelming support for the proposal from faculty. On the basis of this broad cross-university support we now intend to enter into negotiations with campus management to make some version of our proposal, university policy.

This process is slow –too slow it may seem– for people who have been teaching at this university for years without receiving the sort of renumera-ation I agree they should be receiving. But our best chances of implementing a major policy change like this is through the patient work of organizing widespread faculty support to improve contingent faculty working conditions. This takes time. And the labor here is being done by academic and professional faculty volunteers of both UUP and Senate who believe that successful policy development requires full faculty participation.

What is the union doing about underpaid part time adjuncts? Whatever we are able to do in between advising, grading, teaching, and all the other underpaid work we all do around here. The union is, very literally, the workers. It is not a separate organization that provides services to dues-payers. A union can only accomplish whatever bits of time and effort its members set aside for themselves. No matter how challenging work gets, no matter the overwhelming threats to higher education, we must reserve a piece of ourselves for each other and for the union. Because whatever bit of time and effort we invest in each other will be repaid a hundred fold.

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When Change Comes to Your Door:
Elizabeth Vasquez, Sunghee Lee

The recent decision by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to terminate grants (see a list of terminated grants by 3/30/2025 at https://taggs.hhs.gov/Content/Data/HHS_Grants_Terminated.pdf) based on their misalignment with the agency's scientific priorities raises important questions about the intersection of funding, research, and the broader goals of scientific inquiry. It is a significant event that will profoundly affect researchers, their institutions, and the broader scientific community. While grant termination often signals a setback, it also raises critical questions about identity, priorities, and the principles of scientific integrity. The Trump administration sought to frame such instances as a clash between scientific objectivity and the intrusion of so-called "social concerns." However, as researchers face the changing demographics of older adults in the US, we understand that integrating social realities into scientific inquiry does not compromise rigor; rather, it enhances the rigor. It is our experience that acknowledging the social context of research leads to more inclusive, accurate, and impactful science for society.

A bit of background. According to the NIH's 2025 Policy Statement, grants and cooperative agreements are subject to the terms and conditions outlined by the agency, and they reserve the right to terminate grants that no longer align with agency priorities or scientific goals (https://grants.nih.gov/policy-and-compliance/nihgps). In some terminations, the NIH cited concerns that research programs focusing on "artificial or non-scientific categories—specifically diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) objectives"—undermine the advancement of scientific knowledge and public health outcomes. The agency's decision to terminate a grant, while adhering to regulatory frameworks, underscores a broader ideological divide over what constitutes legitimate scientific inquiry.

As researchers, while crafting a grant application, we understand that NIH has every right to ensure that any grants it funds are in line with its mission to advance public health. However, the reasons that are currently cited for a grant termination reflect an ongoing and heated debate over the role of so-called "non-scientific objectives," such as "DEI" in federally funded research. On the one hand, there is an undeniable need to ensure that federal research dollars are spent advancing our understanding of health outcomes. From this perspective, the NIH's focus on maintaining scientific rigor, and prioritizing projects that adhere to it, is entirely justified. However, this stance risks overlooking the potential value of research programs that explicitly aim to address longstanding equity gaps in health and science. Historically, marginalized groups have been underrepresented in clinical trials, health studies, and scientific research especially in aging.[1-5] By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, the scientific community can ensure that the benefits of research are more equitably distributed and that the health needs of all populations are adequately addressed. Ignoring these concerns could perpetuate systemic disparities and limit the applicability of scientific discoveries across diverse populations.

Furthermore, one of the critiques that DEI-focused research "harms the health of Americans" by promoting unlawful discrimination is a concerning characterization without scientific evidence. On the whole, DEI initiatives aim not to discriminate but to correct imbalances and ensure that all groups are set to pursue opportunities for advancement. The potential for bias in research outcomes, whether in treatment protocols, drug development, or disease prevention strategies, can effectively be mitigated by including diverse perspectives (i.e. age, gender, language, country of origin) and considering the experiences of those most affected by health disparities. [1,4,5]

At a time when structural barriers are increasingly recognized as central drivers of health disparities, particularly among racial and ethnically diverse older adults research that includes their lived experiences is both timely and critically important. My research on the ecological effects of social context on health outcomes offers a valuable lens for understanding how systemic structures influence patient-provider dynamics and preventive care practices. Recognizing and mitigating potential biases in research from treatment protocols and drug development to disease prevention for populations requires centering diverse perspectives, including variations in age, gender, language, and nationality. By foregrounding the voices of those most affected by health disparities, we can advance a more equitable and evidence-based approach to healthcare.

The termination of an NIH grant also brings to the forefront issues of scientific integrity. Researchers whose grants are defunded are often faced with difficult decisions regarding the management of data, the treatment of research subjects, and the communication of incomplete results. When funding is terminated, the transition from an active research phase to an abrupt halt can complicate these ethical considerations. Maintaining integrity in research is paramount, even when faced with adversity. Researchers must ensure that the data collected during the grant period is

handled responsibly, whether it leads to publication or remains unpublished. Upholding scientific integrity involves not only adhering to ethical guidelines but also fostering transparency and accountability in the research process.

The current NIH's position on grant termination raises a more fundamental question: should research be focused solely on acceptable, narrowly defined scientific objectives, or is there room for introducing social responsibility within the scientific process? While it is critical to uphold the integrity of scientific inquiry, it is equally important to recognize the role of research in addressing pressing societal issues, such as health inequities. The tension between scientific exploration and social responsibility will likely continue to define the future of publicly funded research for years to come. The NIH's decision reflects its current policy stance, but this issue is far from settled. Research by nature will continue to be dynamic and influenced by a wide range of factors, including societal needs and the evolving landscape of our lived experiences in particular public health. As we continue to confront these complex challenges, we must fully embrace the truth: rigorous science and equity-driven research are not only compatible; in fact, they are inseparable. Advancing scientific knowledge demands that we researchers continue to center inclusion, equity, and responsiveness to the health needs of all the populations we serve.

Lastly, grant termination also poses questions about its identification method. One terminated study aimed to collect data from all racial and ethnic groups. To do so, it introduced over-sampling of small groups to ensure statistical power for the proposed analysis. Seemingly, this was misidentified into "DEI studies." Allocating differential sampling rates (hence, over- or under-sampling) is is a standard practice in a myriad of federal, state as well as local data collection efforts as it providesnecessary statistical power to understand various cross-sections of society. The

method for or the rationale behind identifying this study as a DEI study was not disclosed in the termination letter.

Additionally, NIH's standard practice prioritizes transparency. Even when a study is not funded, the decision is accompanied by a summary statement that includes detailed scores and an explanation from three independent peer reviewers with no known conflict of interest. None of these practices were followed in the recent terminations, an uncharacteristic conduct by NIH.

In conclusion, as stated above, the termination of an NIH grant presents multifaceted challenges that extend beyond the loss of funding. It forces researchers to confront their identities, navigate shifting priorities, and uphold the tenets of scientific integrity. Amid mounting uncertainty, we must urgently confront the role of science in addressing pressing social challenges, question the boundaries of institutional priorities, and act decisively to align scientific progress with the imperative of equity and justice. If we are to truly move the needle on public health, we must ensure that the science we fund not only advances knowledge but does so in a way that is inclusive, ethical, and beneficial to all.

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Questions, Concern, Comments?
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