



POMONA COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

May 13, 2017

Board of Trustees Statement on Free Expression

Since our founding, Pomona College has placed open dialogue at the core of a liberal arts education. Today, as a community made stronger by our differences, we affirm that the best defense of principle is through strong argument.

Pomona has not been immune from the fractious and difficult dialogue that currently permeates the public sphere. The inherent tension that diversity of viewpoints, experiences, and identities brings is part of who we are, even as we remain focused on our educational mission in the face of a seemingly ever more divided society. The Pomona College Board of Trustees welcomes a wide range of points of view on Pomona's campus – even those that may be unpopular. Being exposed to ideas that challenge conventional wisdom, biases, and preconceptions is an essential part of a liberal arts education. As such, the Board supports those who engage in peaceful protest, and opposes on principle any action that seeks to silence the voice of any member of our College community (including those invited to speak at the Claremont Colleges).

The Board also affirms its commitments to academic freedom; to freedom of speech, observance, and expression; and to creating and fostering an inclusive community that provides equity of experience for all.

Establishing a Task Force on Public Dialogue

Questions of how best to promote the values of free expression and inclusivity require thoughtful consideration. Over time, we have created formal and informal structures with the explicit goal of fostering open dialogue and rigorous argument; these include a variety of speaker series, conversations in classrooms and residence halls, and specific decisions regarding curriculum, class sizes, staff, architecture, policies, and programming.

These structures have served us well, but as the global environment, the composition of the campus community, and technological tools for dialogue have evolved, we must seek to evolve as well. The resources we provide, and the skills we impart in our students, by their natures shape public dialogue – and we must be deliberate in how we deploy such tools.

Pomona has long been a College that prizes an environment that mixes principled, rigorous dissent with deep and informed engagement. In this intense and even fractious time, we have an obligation to engage thoughtfully internally and in the public sphere, and prize continued partnerships across our community of faculty, students, staff, trustees, and alumni.

For these reasons, the Board establishes a Task Force on Public Dialogue, comprised of the following members:

- Four trustees (one of whom shall co-chair the Task Force), to be nominated by the Trusteeship Committee of the Board of Trustees
- Four faculty members (one of whom shall co-chair the Task Force), three of whom shall be appointed by the Faculty Executive Committee, and one of whom shall be the Dean of the College or her designee
- The Dean of Students or her designee
- The Senior Class President
- The Junior Class President

The Task Force's aim should be high. It should look for ways for Pomona to be a leader in developing an educational model that speaks to the twenty-first century, and that does not just allow for free expression, but combines support of free speech and democratic ideals with a commitment to ensuring an equitable and inclusive environment for all students.

The inquiry we propose should begin with understanding the causes of and considerations regarding conflicts about the values of free expression, inclusiveness, and rigorous inquiry at Pomona College, and then an investigation of innovative practices and initiatives at other colleges and universities. Ultimately, the Task Force should recommend to the President and Board of Trustees ways Pomona, as its own unique institution, can model engagement and openness in the public sphere. These recommendations should be broad, and consider opportunities for improvement and innovation in open dialogue across resourcing (faculty, staff, and funding), facilities, technology, programming, policies, and curriculum. While not all of the recommendations must be ready for immediate implementation, they should be as specific as possible – *e.g.*, should policy changes be recommended, the Task Force should specify the principles underlying such changes in addition to the policies to which changes are recommended, but need not draft specific policy language.

In doing its work, the Task Force is encouraged to engage with a diverse range of students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, and community members to understand a variety of viewpoints regarding the issues at hand.

The Board asks the Task Force to complete its work no later than May 2018, and sooner if practicable.