



# CASE STUDY

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## MOVING MIZZOU FORWARD: REFORM IDEAS FROM AROUND THE NATION

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The University of Missouri–Columbia and the broader University of Missouri System are at a crossroads. Spurred on by last year’s protests, the state legislature has created an independent review committee to examine what is happening on campus and in the management of the university. At the end of 2016, the University of Missouri Board of Curators selected a new president, Dr. Mun Choi, who has an opportunity to make positive changes to the way Mizzou and the broader university system operate.

This moment gives us an opportunity to take a step back, examine the workings of the university, and offer ways to make Mizzou and the University of Missouri system better

and stronger. Every organization can improve, and every organization can learn from others doing similar work. New ideas in higher education are cropping up across the country, and leaders in Missouri should be evaluating those ideas when they are searching for ways to improve Mizzou.

What makes a quality university education? If there is going to be any talk about improving the University of Missouri system, we have to start with a common set of expectations. We would like to offer three benchmarks for the University of Missouri system. The first is **affordability**. Can students afford to attend? If students spend more to attend the university than they receive for having attended

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it, they probably should have done something else with their time and money. Similarly, if qualified potential students are unable to attend because of cost, our state is leaving a huge amount of human capital on the table, and will be poorer as a result. Tightly linked to affordability is **relevance**. Are students learning things that will be useful to them in their later lives? Relevance can be thought of more broadly than simply in relation to getting a job; however, if a student's education does not enable him to make enough money to pay for the experience, then that education probably was not relevant enough to his circumstance. Finally, a quality university education will possess **rigor**. Particularly at our state's flagship public university, Mizzou, students should be challenged both by their studies and by their experiences on campus. This can only occur in a community that is open to diverse perspectives and protects fundamental freedoms of speech.

In this paper, we present three brief case studies organized around the principles of affordability, relevance, and rigor. The first will describe the efforts afoot at Purdue University, where President Mitch Daniels is implementing a series of innovations that are aimed at decreasing the cost and improving the quality, relevance, and affordability of the education that the university provides. The second will take a state-wide look at efforts in Texas to customize and personalize the higher education options available to students in the Lone Star State while also improving affordability and rigor. Finally, we will look to one of the most elite private institutions in the nation, The University of Chicago, as an example of creating a rigorous learning environment by protecting free speech and fostering robust discussion on campus.

We hope that a clear picture will emerge from these examples. The nature of higher education in America is changing. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the typical college student is a "nontraditional" one. In fact, 74 percent of students in the most recent data had at least one characteristic of a "nontraditional student"; that is, they either had one or more dependents, were a single caregiver, did not have a traditional high school diploma, delayed postsecondary enrollment, attended school part time, or were employed full time.<sup>1</sup> Our institutions of higher education must

change as well. The purpose of this paper is not to create cookie-cutter recommendations, but rather to spark creative thinking about what is possible.

With that, let's head to our first stop on the journey: Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana.

## **PURDUE UNIVERSITY: MAKING "MOVES" ON AFFORDABILITY AND RELEVANCE**

In 2013, former governor of Indiana Mitch Daniels began his term as President of Purdue University and brought the innovative mindset that marked his time as Indiana's governor to campus. As one of his first steps, Daniels froze tuition for all students in the 2012–13 school year. That price will stabilize the cost for students at least until the end of the 2016–17 year. But it is not just tuition—meal plans and housing charges have been held flat since 2014.

Purdue softened the financial blow of the tuition freeze through increased enrollment (which brought in an additional \$8.7 million), increased state funding (\$11 million increase in FY 2014), and smaller payroll increases for faculty (a 1.3-percent salary increase in 2014).<sup>2</sup> These circumstances certainly help with limiting tuition costs, but prices cannot stay the same indefinitely. Daniels has spoken many times about the issues that confront the current generation regarding affordability and accountability, and he has taken drastic steps to implement a new system known as "Purdue Moves." The program's goals include altering the traditional college environment in ways that will make higher education more affordable and accessible to students.

While universities around the country offer plans for fiscal responsibility and containing costs, Purdue's plans are succeeding. Many of these efforts are in their early stages, but where better to learn than from a Research-1\* public university in a Midwestern state that is taking steps to provide a higher quality education at a lower cost to its students?

There are many "Purdue Moves," but we'd like to highlight four:

*\* "Research-1" is a designation created by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to denote the universities with the "highest research activity." Purdue University and the University of Missouri-Columbia are 2 of 115 U.S. universities with this designation.*

- Competency-based education that creates opportunity for students to move through course material at a faster pace, ultimately driving down cost
- Income-share agreements that change the way that students finance their education
- The Gallup-Purdue Index, an unprecedented attempt at transparency and accountability
- A new partnership with Amazon aimed at improving student quality of life on campus.

### Initiative 1: Competency-based Education

In the fall of 2014 Purdue announced its first competency-based education program. Competency-based education (CBE) is an accreditation system in which students are granted credit for subject areas based upon demonstration of their knowledge. CBE transitions away from the traditional 15-week semester and instead creates a flexible environment in which students may advance through their program at individual speeds rather than a one-size-fits-all schedule. Students who show they have mastered the content are free to move forward.

Purdue's College of Technology, now known as Purdue Polytechnic Institute, accepted a group of 36 students into the pilot version of its new transdisciplinary studies in technology degree. The degree is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and accepts incoming Boilermakers.<sup>3</sup> The initial class is small, as the program was designed to involve very low student-to-faculty ratios to encourage academic exploration. As the program is expanded, it will be closely monitored so administrators can learn how to offer similar opportunities to larger populations.

Mitch Daniels awarded \$500,000 to the Polytechnic Institute to fund its new program.<sup>4</sup> Students earn credit after demonstrating expertise in eight broadly defined primary competencies. Purdue boasts that the program will enable degrees to be awarded based on mastery of concepts and skills rather than performance simply measured by calendar intervals. In addition, Purdue is now offering its first three-year degree program and is looking into shifting to a year-round trimester schedule in order to shorten the time students must spend in school.

Students who aren't obligated to continue studying a subject they have already mastered will graduate in less time, resulting in thousands of dollars in savings in tuition, room, and board, as well as earlier entrance into salary-earning professions. It's a win-win.

Despite the improvements at Purdue, Mitch Daniels said that the greatest inhibitor to CBE is "the inflexibility of the federal definition of student progress. Nationally, this is the largest roadblock to more widespread use of competency-based programs."<sup>5</sup> Hopefully, Purdue is forging a path for other schools toward CBE programs. Widespread adoption of this model is likely to lead to improved communication from one school to another and make a world of difference to transfer students, who in the past have been forced to repeat coursework due to accreditation restrictions. Increasing the popularity and acceptance of CBE might also pressure states and the federal government to loosen regulations around the definition of student progress to better allow students to proceed through their education at their own pace rather than on a schedule preferred by bureaucrats.

### Initiative 2: Income Share Agreements

Purdue has also decided to explore an alternative to traditional student loans by allowing students to finance their education through income share agreements (ISAs). Rather than a traditional student loan, where students agree to a fixed repayment schedule in exchange for a lump sum of money, with an ISA a lender offers a sum of money in exchange for a guaranteed percentage of the borrower's future salary for a set period of time.

Interestingly, ISAs are not a new idea, and in fact can trace their intellectual history back to Nobel-Prize winning economist Milton Friedman. In his landmark work, *Capitalism and Freedom*, he presented an idea for income-contingent student loans. A version of this idea has been incorporated into the federal government's income-based repayment plans, but instead of privatizing benefits while socializing risk (which programs like the government's does), the plan proposed by Friedman would socialize both risks and benefits, as extremely high earning graduates would end up paying far more than what they initially borrowed, subsidizing those who never earned enough to pay back what they had borrowed.<sup>6</sup> Alan Krueger,

former chair of the Obama administration's council of economic advisors, and William Bowen offered guidance for designing such a system more than 20 years ago in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*.<sup>7</sup> This is neither a new nor radical idea, but one that is ripe for experimentation.

Purdue's plan is a smaller-scale test of what Friedman proposed and Krueger and Bowen refined. While the idea is straightforward, an example might best illustrate the key differences between traditional loans and ISAs:

Imagine that Mark and Lisa have both just graduated from their respective universities and, after all scholarship and financial aid has been accounted for, both owe \$40,000 in tuition expenses. Lisa chose the traditional path of federal student aid and now finds herself with 6 months to pay off loans before interest begins accumulating. Let's assume the loan's interest rate is 4.66% (the 2014–2015 federal rate) and she chooses to put 10% of her salary towards paying off loans every year. For simplicity's sake we will also assume that it took her 6 months to find the job so that she has payments as soon as interest begins to accrue.

Mark, on the other hand, funded his tuition through an ISA in exchange for 10% of his yearly income for the next 10 years. Under Mark's agreement he will have to pay more money if he has a higher starting salary, and less money if his salary is lower. Table 1 shows a comparison of different debt sums given the two methods of repayment. As expected, a lower salary under federal loans results in a longer payment period and thus a larger total payment. As Lisa's salary increases she is able to pay off a larger portion of the debt each year and less interest accrues.

Total payment takes an opposite approach with the ISA and grows along with base salary, so as income increases the total amount that is repaid increases as well. If Mark and Lisa both found full time jobs that paid \$35,000 after graduating, Mark would be in a much healthier financial position because he would only pay \$35,000 while Lisa would be held accountable for \$58,457 (a difference of \$23,457!).

ISAs are not always the winner in the borrowing game, however. If both students graduated with starting salaries of \$60,000, then Mark would end up paying back \$10,972 more than Lisa. This difference would grow with each incremental increase in base salary, but it is not as discouraging as it may seem, because while Mark may be paying higher rates, his earnings are increasing with a higher base salary as well.

Starting in the 2016–2017 school year, the Purdue Research Foundation has implemented an ISA program in which they loan money to current students and then reinvest the returns into future student borrowing. Mitch Daniels testified before Congress in 2015 in favor of nationwide ISAs, stating that they would both help students with their loan burdens and provide incentives for organizations to mentor students without the use of additional tax dollars.

Students are not left out in the cold to weigh the pros and cons of undertaking an ISA. Purdue's "Back-a-Boiler" program provides a comparison tool that is open for anyone to use. It uses industry average salaries to estimate rates for ISAs and then compares them to PLUS loans

Table 1

Base Salary	Lisa's Federal Loan		Mark's ISA	
	Years	Total Payment	Years	Total Payment
35,000	16	58,457	10	35,000
40,000	13	55,112	10	40,000
45,000	11	52,859	10	45,000
50,000	10	51,231	10	50,000
55,000	9	49,986	10	55,000
60,000	8	49,028	10	60,000

and private loan rates. The charts provided make it much easier for students to make informed decisions regarding how they will best go about funding their educations. The key distinction between the two forms of lending is that with ISAs, debt is essentially nonexistent. The agreement of a portion of salary essentially acts as a safety net so that if a student cannot find employment, the investor ultimately bears the consequences.

The comparison tool also allows students to see different industry averages from college graduates, providing a simple measurement for students when they are trying to decide if a certain degree is ideal for them. Obviously, salary is not the only determinant when deciding what to study, but having information about potential earnings can certainly be helpful.

### **Initiative 3: The Gallup–Purdue Index**

Another goal for Purdue Moves has been to provide prospective students with an accurate depiction of what their programs offer in the long run. Lack of information is a huge problem in higher education. While the ACT and SAT can help students decide whether or not to attend college, where they should go to school and what they should major in are often decisions made mostly in the dark. Do marketing majors from Mizzou do better in the labor market than those from the University of Missouri–St. Louis? Is it better to major in engineering at Missouri S&T or Mizzou? We don't give students much information when they are making such decisions.

To try and combat this problem, Purdue partnered with the research and analytics firm Gallup to create the Gallup-Purdue Index (GPI). The comprehensive national study of more than 60,000 college graduates is intended to provide a measure of how well graduates are doing in five key aspects of well-being: purpose, social, physical, financial, and community.<sup>8</sup> The index is designed to serve as a nationwide benchmarking tool “created by higher education for higher education.” Gallup is inviting other institutions to take part in the research, and as the base of schools expands the information available to students regarding how valuable their education is will only increase. The GPI has released two annual reports thus far and plans to continue until 2018.

Some of the key findings from the first two year's reports include that there is no difference in workplace engagement or a graduate's well-being based on whether they attended a public or private not-for-profit institution, and that students who had a mentor were twice as likely to be engaged at work. Additionally, students who took out no school loan debt were three times as likely to be “thriving in their well-being” as their counterparts who had \$20,000 to \$40,000 in student loans.<sup>9</sup>

Daniels supported the index, saying “Students and their parents deserve to know with confidence whether a college they are considering has a trustworthy track record of developing successful, engaged, and fulfilled graduates.” Additionally, he believes the index will help businesses recruit new graduates. It shouldn't surprise us that every university talks up their school to prospective students. Indices such as the GPI can help students decide how well schools back up that talk.

### **Initiative 4: Amazon Partnership**

If schools want to bring down costs for students, there are savings to be had outside of the classroom. Books, living expenses, and food place a heavy financial burden on many students, and Purdue has taken steps to alleviate those pressures. A private partnership with Amazon began in 2015 when the first-ever Amazon pickup store was launched on Purdue's campus. The arrangement offers discounted purchases and expedited shipping to students, who can order goods online and pick up them up in the school's store the next day. In addition to improved access to school supplies, a portion of all profits generated are given back to the university and then invested in school scholarships and affordability funds.

The Amazon store on campus offers over a million items from textbooks to toothpaste, so just about anything a student may need can be purchased with ease. The partnership is a win–win–win as every party involved gains something. Amazon expands its reach outward and is introduced to a new wave of potential lifelong customers, Purdue is granted a portion of revenue to put toward future scholarships, and students gain access to discounted products in a more timely manner than a traditional school bookstore might provide. In one

semester alone, students have saved an estimated \$580,000 on textbooks, with an average savings of 30%.<sup>10</sup> Since the initial development at Purdue, Amazon has expanded to other universities such as the University of Texas–Austin and the University of California–Berkeley. Private partnerships such as Purdue’s with Amazon can provide cheaper alternatives to funding school accessories, and there may be other potential sources of savings down the road.

Over the past few years Purdue has taken some large strides toward renovating its educational structure. Student debt has become more burdensome for graduates each year, and fundamental changes must be made in higher education to combat it. Rather than simply reducing tuition prices, Purdue has worked to tackle the problem from multiple angles that may improve efficiency, affordability, and transparency.

Purdue is improving the lives of its students at a personal level while simultaneously emerging as a model for collegiate reform. Other schools have followed in Purdue’s footsteps in an effort to improve their local environments and attract new students, and the call for innovation will only grow as more universities see where the industry is moving.

## THE TEXAS STORY: STRIVING FOR AFFORDABILITY AND RELEVANCE

While the saying “everything is bigger in Texas” pokes fun at the state’s geographic size, it holds some truth with regard to the state’s ideas for higher education. In 2011 Texas Governor Rick Perry challenged state universities to make school more affordable. In particular, he called upon schools to develop programs that would award bachelor’s degrees that cost no more than \$10,000, including textbooks. Given that in 2011 the average in-state public university Texan was charged \$14,804 for schooling each year, it was a big ask.<sup>11</sup>

At the time, there was serious pushback against the idea. Groups such as the Travis County Democrats called the idea preposterous and said “nobody in higher education believes that is even possible.”<sup>12</sup> Perry disagreed, saying that the revolution could be attained through the use of online learning and competency-based education. One year later

the naysayers were proved wrong when Texas A&M–San Antonio became the first school to respond with a \$10,000 bachelor’s degree in information technology. By 2014, a total of 12 Texas schools had announced \$10,000 degree offerings.

While this ambitious program got up and running quickly, there were still some kinks to work out. The first generation of \$10,000 degrees did save students money, but not because of actual improvements to efficiency. For example, the University of Texas of the Permian Basin created its “Texas Science Scholars program,” which accepted a select group of STEM students and capped their tuition at \$2,500 a year. A \$10,000 degree was thus created, but the average cost for students *not* in the program was \$6,300 per year.<sup>13</sup> William R. Fannin, the university’s former provost and vice president for academic affairs, said that this tuition cap was possible thanks to recent construction on campus, so the marginal cost for housing and educating extra students was lower. Essentially, the cost for the students paying \$10,000 was covered by other students. The tuition-cap initiative did not fundamentally alter the way the degree was financed or the cost structure of the program. This creative accounting is great for the students who benefit, but it’s imperative that we make the distinction between remodeling a program to lower costs and simply subsidizing a select portion of the population.

Fortunately, this obstacle to savings is being corrected. In 2014 the Texas Higher Education Coordination Board (THECB), South Texas College (STC), and Texas A&M University–Commerce (A&M-Commerce) launched the Texas Affordable Baccalaureate (TAB) Program. The TAB Program is the state’s first competency-based bachelor degree, aimed to capture the efficiencies that Gov. Perry laid out in his \$10,000 challenge.

### Affordable Baccalaureate Program

According to Educause, a nonprofit association that aims to further education through the use of information technology, more than 3.6 million Texans who have earned college credit lack a degree.<sup>14</sup> The concept underlying the TAB Program—similar to Purdue’s CBE initiative—is to grant credit to students when they demonstrate mastery in subject areas rather than after they spend a set amount

of time in a classroom. This approach improves the affordability and efficiency of a degree for those students who otherwise wouldn't be able to cross the finish line by allowing degrees to cost as little as \$750 per term and allowing students to receive as much credit as they can earn during said terms.

The current structure of the program involves students earning their first 90 credit hours through self-paced, online, competency-based modules, and the final 30 hours through a hybrid of traditional classroom settings and online classes. For students who begin the program with an associate degree already in hand or experience from the workforce, the competency-based core curriculum is fast-tracked. A maximum of 75% of the degrees' requirements can be met through either transfer credits or prior learning assessment, so students could potentially test straight into their final 30 credit hours of school.

Of course, programs such as this take time and money to develop; the TAB Program used a \$1 million grant from the EDUCAUSE Next Generation Learning Challenge in addition to a significant amount of time from both Texas A&M and STC. The two schools estimate they spent \$250,000 and \$160,000, respectively, in their work to jump start the program.<sup>15</sup> These figures are no small chunk of change, but the resulting savings are noteworthy. THECB estimates that the program's cost per credit for the applied baccalaureate in organizational leadership is roughly half the cost of a traditional degree. Their estimated savings of \$113.73 per credit potentially save students between \$13,088 and \$23,088 in tuition and two semesters of time (and therefore additional potential revenue from entering the workforce).<sup>16</sup>

The success of the program has inspired others to look into modeling it, and in January 2016, AT&T announced that it would be contributing \$400,000 to THECB's College for All Texans Foundation in an effort to expand the current TAB program from two campuses to ten. The foundation intends to enroll more than 21,000 students over the first five years, and THECB's chairman Bobby Jenkins says that "Expansion of the TAB program is a key to achieving the state's 60x30TX higher education goals." The 60x30TX strategic plan aims to ensure that at least 60% of Texans age 25 to 34 will have a degree in hand by 2030. Jenkins praises the competency-based aspect of TAB

because it caters to nontraditional students who are older, are already in the workforce, and have some education but no degree.

### A&M's Accountability Dashboard

Ensuring that colleges are affordable is half of the battle, but quality is ultimately what matters. Unfortunately, for too many college students, the time they spend in university does not yield results. Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa's breakthrough book *Academically Adrift* reported that 45% of students nationally demonstrate little to no increase in general collegiate skills (critical thinking, reasoning, and writing) during their first 2 years of college, and after 4 years only 36% do.<sup>17</sup> The paths to combating this are intertwined. For colleges to improve the impact they have on students, the first step is to make it clear that the money they spend is being put to good use.

It is important to remember that major universities have twin goals: preparing students and conducting important research. This is why when we talk about the money a university spends and the return on that investment, we have to include both the money spent educating students and the money spent conducting research. To leave either out would misrepresent both the mission of the university and the reality of how funds are allocated.

In 2012 Texas A&M launched its accountability dashboard, which today publishes a variety of academic performance indicators, including graduation rates, average GRE scores attained by students, and the amount of money that teachers are bringing in for research. In a manner similar to an accounting balance sheet, the system dove into the financial contributions that each faculty member throughout the 11 campuses brought in. Salaries were subtracted from tuition and research money that faculty brought in, and teachers were either listed, in terms of research, as in the black or in the red. Now, it is true that such a system might be gameable; that is, to stay in the black a professor could focus all of his or her time on chasing research grants and do as little teaching as possible. However, this particular metric is just one out of many that the dashboard measures in order to evaluate faculty. It paints part of—not the whole—picture.

This data is certainly helpful, but the main reason the dashboard is relevant to our study is its intended purpose. When it was first announced, the Lone Star State believed its commitment to accountability would be replicated by other states due to the seemingly uncontrollable rate of tuition inflation, but the new reform from Texas A&M actually received quite a bit of backlash from educators. The reason: it made things *too* transparent.

According to Frank Ashley, the vice chancellor for academic affairs at the A&M system, the purpose of the accountability initiative was to demonstrate that the collegiate system was properly using every dollar, but many teachers felt that the career and hiring implications of such a metric were laid too bare and were unfair.<sup>18</sup> Faculty spoke out against the dashboard, arguing that it failed to take into account the hours that teachers put into preparing lectures, advising students, or serving on committees, or time put toward other campus activities. Critics of the spreadsheet also said that judging faculty efficiency by their class size was unfair since they often could not choose classes to teach, but were instead assigned their courses by their department heads. This, in addition to complaints about inaccuracies, led to the document being taken down. The current accountability website measures aggregate numbers on research dollars and student-to-faculty ratios, but no longer displays its black and red spreadsheet.

The system introduced some important discussion points regarding how we should measure the contributions made by faculty members. At the same time, it demonstrated how much debate there is over transparency in the university setting. The dashboard's rise and fall should be considered in the future when we seek fair and accurate ways to evaluate how public education dollars are being spent.

## STARS

Every university wants to improve its reputation, and a good way to do so is by being at the forefront of new research. At the same time, research can be unpredictable and costly, without yielding tangible results. To increase the likelihood that the money it invests in research will lead to meaningful results, the University of Texas created the Science and Technology Acquisition and Retention

(STARS) program. The program, which provides funding for the purchase of new research and laboratory equipment in hopes of attracting top-tier researchers, first came into effect in 2004 and is still active today. Three goals outline the program's mission<sup>19</sup>:

1. To retain high-quality faculty who would otherwise move to more advanced research facilities.
2. To recruit "star" faculty members who have established reputations in their fields.
3. To improve the quality of new faculty and research capacity via augmented start-up packages for tenure-tracked assistants and early associate professors.

William H. McRaven, UT's System Chancellor, summarized the program's mission when he said "In order to attract the best students and make research discoveries that improve the lives of Texans, we must be able to recruit the nation's finest faculty."<sup>20</sup>

The funding process includes an application that consists of a recommendation letter from the President, the candidate's curriculum vitae, a budget, and a clear summary of justification for the necessity of new equipment or renovations. In February 2016, the UT System Board of Regents voted to approve \$30 million to be allocated into the STARS program, and the system seems to be working. The university has attracted Nobel Prize winners in Physics and Medicine.

Revolutionary discoveries are by nature unpredictable, but STARS is based on the belief that a strong roster of researchers increases the chances of discoveries taking place in Texas. The numbers certainly support this belief, with a cumulative investment of \$178 million since 2004 resulting in 6,264 scientific articles published, 200 patents, the recruiting of five members of the National Academy of Science, and a return of \$1.3 billion in external research funding.<sup>21</sup> UT's allocation of funds toward facilitating research has proved successful, increasing their name recognition in the scientific community, and it certainly appears that they are getting a good bang for each buck of investment in their STEM research.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO: RIGOROUS EDUCATION THROUGH FREE SPEECH

In September 2015, protests erupted on the University of Missouri's campus in response to racial slurs directed towards Student Government President Payton Head and other reported incidents of racism. Over the course of the next few months, students spoke out against the lack of initiative from Mizzou's leadership in combating such bigotry on campus, and the pressure generated by the protestors led to University System President Tim Wolfe's resignation.

But perhaps one of the most lingering moments from that period is from a viral video of Melissa Click, a former assistant professor of Communication at the University of Missouri, assaulting a student reporter who was filming a protest on campus. Her well known cry for "muscle" to help remove the student led to an assault charge and her removal from her position at the University and added intensity to discussions on campus regarding where free speech should and shouldn't be protected.

In October of the same year, two Yale professors, Erika and Nicholas Christakis, received backlash from students and calls for their resignation when they wrote an open letter asking students if it was healthy to regulate what can and cannot be worn on Halloween simply out of fear of offending others.<sup>22</sup> The letter asks in a hypothetical manner whether students should be forced to adhere to restraints or if sensible judgment would be a wiser deterrent from offensive behavior. Video of one of the professors patiently explaining himself in the face of increasingly hysterical students went viral as well, and the nation found itself in another discussion on whether colleges are too complacent about what speech is allowed, or if the exact opposite is true.

With racial tensions and student protests growing more prevalent on campuses, students and faculty find themselves walking a fine line between free speech and campus comity. Some campuses have initiated the use of "safe spaces" and "free speech zones" in an effort to control conflicts on campus and ensure that students, faculty, and guest speakers don't offend members of the community.

A student cannot receive a rigorous, relevant education without being exposed to ideas that are discomforting or challenging. That is the way education works. As our nation becomes more diverse and our world more interconnected, students are going to encounter people with views and values vastly different than their own, and if they do not learn how to interact with such people in socially appropriate ways, they will be hamstrung in the workplace, in social settings, and in our vibrant, churning democracy.

The University of Chicago has taken the opposite approach of "safe spaces" and "free speech zoners" and embraced the ideas that the primary function of a university is to increase knowledge, free interchange of ideas is necessary, and shielding students can be detrimental to educational development.

### Chicago's Committee on Freedom of Expression:

In July 2014, Robert J. Zimmer, the University of Chicago's President, appointed a Committee on Freedom of Expression to draft a statement "articulating the University's overarching commitment to free, robust, and uninhibited debate and deliberation among all members of the University's community."<sup>23</sup> Zimmer announced that this statement would reassert values that the school has always held, but which have come into question on other campuses nationwide over recent years.<sup>24</sup> The official report, released in January 2015, stated that "the principle of complete freedom of speech on all subjects has from the beginning been regarded as fundamental in the University of Chicago" and that this principle must live on.

The three-page report referenced notable figures from the university's past and quoted their views on the university's role as a medium for the exchange of ideas. The recurring theme is that the university has a duty to provide a safe environment where members are free to exchange their ideas in a civil manner. Robert M. Hutchins, a former president of the university, said that the cure to opposing ideas is not inhibition, but rather discussion, and that a university exists for the sole sake of hosting said discussion.

The report states:

*Of course, the ideas of different members of the University community will often and quite naturally conflict. But 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. Although the University greatly values civility, and although all members of the University community share in the responsibility for maintaining a climate of mutual respect, concerns about civility and mutual respect can never be used as a justification for closing off discussion of ideas, however offensive or disagreeable those ideas may be to some members of our community.*

## Conflicting Views

The University of Chicago's stance is not universally shared among institutions however, and some universities have recently found that discussion can be dangerous when unpopular ideas are presented. One must look no farther than Yale's campus to see, in HD video, exactly how viciously unpopular ideas can be attacked.

In fact, the issue presented here is hardly limited to Yale's campus. The Pew Research Center recently found that 40% of millennials believe that the government should be able to prevent people from publicly making statements that offend minority groups.<sup>25</sup> Twenty-seven percent of Gen-Xers felt the same way, while only 12% of the Silent Generation agreed with this statement. The overall trend has been that each new generation is more in favor of limiting free speech if it will offend someone.

Policy at the University of Chicago stands in stark opposition to this trend. The school's policy on "Civil Behavior in a University Setting" states that the university will not attempt to shield people from unwelcome or offensive speech, and that the only time the school will intervene is if demonstrations directly limit other school community members from learning or doing their jobs.<sup>26</sup> The university intends to limit itself to restricting expression

*...that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the University.*

Discussion is encouraged on campus even if it may make participants uncomfortable, but if a threat to either the campus's or an individual's well being comes about, then the University reserves the right to step in. The wording behind such policies is open-ended because it is impossible to create a blanket statement that could take into account every scenario. That said, the university has a more defined policy regarding the time and place for protests. The University of Chicago states that the right to freedom of expression includes peaceful protests and orderly demonstration, but protests may be limited if members engage in conduct that disrupts the University's operations or endangers the safety of others.

*Disruptive conduct is conduct by any member of the University community that substantially obstructs, impairs, or interferes with: (i) teaching, study, research, or administration of the University, including UCMC's clinical mission; (ii) the authorized and other permissible use of University facilities, including meetings of University students, faculty, staff, administrators and/or guests; or (iii) the rights and privileges of other members of the University community. Any member of the University who engages in disruptive conduct will be subject to disciplinary action. Disruptive conduct includes but is not limited to (1) obstruction, impairment, or interference with University sponsored or authorized activities or facilities in a manner that is likely to or does deprive others of the benefit or enjoyment of the activity or facility and (2) use or threatened use of force against any member of the University community or his or her family that substantially and directly bears upon the member's functions within the University.*

The takeaway from the University of Chicago's speech policies is that it is the University's duty to protect speech no matter how unpopular it may appear, but if a message becomes disruptive or endangers another individual, then action should be taken to address the issue. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting civil liberties in academia, has endorsed the University of Chicago's policy on freedom of expression and has a page online enabling anyone who wishes to pledge their support the school's statement to do so.<sup>27</sup>

The **Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE)** has promoted free speech since its founding in 1999, and has become more prominent in recent years due to increased campus turmoil. FIRE is a nonprofit focused on civil liberties in academia and has promoted its fundamental belief via multiple avenues nationwide.

In 2015, FIRE received 807 inquiries from students and professors seeking assistance with possible civil liberty violations.<sup>28</sup> The organization raises awareness via news releases, op-eds, and media appearances in an effort to bring attention to the issues, and when necessary, their legal team represents students and faculty members who believe their First Amendment rights are at stake. But they do not just react to incidents on campus; they also publish a database ranking schools based upon their conduct guidelines. Currently, the Speech Code Rating System holds information on more than 400 colleges and universities and gives qualitative ratings to each one.

Schools are rated with either a red light (meaning that at least one policy clearly restricts freedom of speech), a yellow light (meaning the wording of the policy is vague enough as to raise concern over possible restriction of speech), or a green light (meaning that FIRE does not see anything that threatens free expression).<sup>29</sup>

FIRE has written letters to hundreds of faculty, students, and student journalists encouraging them to adopt statements similar to the University of Chicago's. FIRE focuses on other schools' advancements as well, and has even designated a portion of its website to honor a different school every month. The "Speech Code of the Month" page outlines recent changes that a school has enacted, and honors them for taking time to reevaluate their speech code.

Greg Lukianoff, FIRE's president since 2006, is encouraging every school in the nation to adopt a policy similar to that of the University of Chicago that condones free speech and facilitates a healthy debate environment. He says that when you train a generation to believe that they have the right not to be offended, "eventually they stop demanding freedom of speech and start demanding freedom from speech."<sup>30</sup>

In addition to urging campuses to adopt policies, the organization has reached out to students to form FIRE Student Networks on campuses and recently released a new documentary titled "Can We Take a Joke?" The film explores the trend of campus guests (particularly comedians) having to walk on eggshells for fear of offending students and thus receiving negative media attention. "Can We Take a Joke?" has circulated to more than 240 campuses in the past year, and as of July 29 is available for viewing nationwide.<sup>31,32</sup>



**Missouri State University**



**University of Missouri–  
Saint Louis**



**Washington University**



**Missouri University of  
Science and Technology**



**University of Central  
Missouri**



**University of Missouri–  
Columbia**



**Saint Louis University**



**Saint Louis Community  
College–Meremec**



**Saint Charles Community  
College**



At least one policy clearly restricts freedom of speech.



Wording of the policy is vague enough to raise concern over possible restriction of speech.



A private university that clearly and consistently states that it holds a certain set of values above a commitment to freedom of speech.



Not yet rated.

## An Honest Letter to Prospective Students

The University of Chicago has gained national attention for its stance on free expression, and the university is unapologetic on its position. A month before the incoming class of 2020 began classes on campus, university officials sent a letter to prospective students welcoming them and making it clear that rigorous debate, discussion, and disagreement will be welcome on the campus. The letter states:

*Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called 'trigger warnings,' we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual 'safe spaces' where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.*

The no-nonsense tone behind these words makes it clear that the University of Chicago will not coddle its students. If a situation arises that is potentially endangering, then actions may be taken, but if a conversation merely offends students, then it is not the University's place to step in and shield students from the free exchange of ideas. The University has the *opposite* duty and should do everything in its power to enable such conversations to take place in a civil manner.

The University of Chicago's leaders believe that free speech is not only a moral imperative, but also a necessity in order for a university to thrive. As university President Robert M. Hutchings observed, "Without a vibrant commitment to free and open inquiry, a university ceases to be a university."<sup>33</sup> It is a school's duty not to take a stance, but rather to enable individuals to do so.

## TAKEAWAYS

What lessons can we glean from these examples? We can identify four:

1. **Perpetually rising student costs are not written in the stars; universities can take steps to bring them down.** From Texas's TAB program to Purdue's competency-based tracks, universities can make the provision of education more efficient and effective. This can help students progress more

quickly though material, which not only cuts tuition costs but also room and board and foregone wages. Universities can leverage technology, allow students to move through courses at their own pace, and give credit for outside life experiences and knowledge. Some of these programs take time and resources to establish, but others can be accomplished with little retooling. The mindset shift is more work than the policy change.

2. **Knowledge matters.** More so than K-12 education, higher education functions like a marketplace—a heavily regulated marketplace with a great deal of government interference, but a marketplace nonetheless. Unfortunately, one group of participants in that marketplace—the consumers—lack much of the information that they need to make the best choices. How do universities compare when it comes to labor-market outcomes? How do programs within universities compare? How does the same major compare across different universities? Without indices like Gallup-Purdue, the decisions students make are less informed, and therefore likely to be less fruitful. Similarly, dashboards like Texas A&M's provide valuable transparency to the often-opaque world of research, and clarify how dollars are being spent. Innovations like these give students, faculty, and taxpayers more and better information, which can only push institutions to function better.
3. **There are real ways to improve the quality of student life.** Improving student life has traditionally meant improving the offerings in dining halls, renovating recreation centers, or creating more on-campus programming. Purdue's Amazon partnership offers a new option to improve the lives of students: cut the cost of the goods that they need. If textbooks and all the other sundries are 30% cheaper, students have more disposable income to spend on food or other items that make their time in college more enjoyable. Similarly, changing offerings for financial support, like ISA programs, can make student's lives better as well. Rather than being stressed by large student loans hanging over their heads, students can relax

and focus on their studies, because regardless of how much money they make when they get out of school, they already know what percentage of it they will owe. These are real ways to ease the stress and burden on students and improve the quality of their time in college.

4. **Freedom of speech and debate is at risk and can be protected.** It seems that not a week of the school year goes by without some story emerging about efforts by a student council, residence hall, professor, or school administrator to stifle the speech of students. If we do not impress upon our students the importance of free speech and defend it vigorously, we risk creating a citizenry that does not value one of the foundational values upon which our nation was built. Luckily, institutions like the University of Chicago offer a great blueprint for fostering debate and protecting speech. Mizzou would be wise to study that blueprint carefully.

## CONCLUSION

The schools profiled here are a mix of public and private schools, individual campuses and state-wide systems. In all cases, they are hotbeds of innovation. While it is unwise to copy wholesale what other organizations are doing (there are important differences in the contexts in which they operate that might make replication challenging), the fundamental principles that are driving reform should spur all institutions of higher education to think about what they are doing and how they can do it better.

The University of Missouri has a long and proud tradition. If that tradition is going to continue, the university needs to assume a leadership role in shaping the emerging university environment. One thing that is likely to endure is competition: for students, research grants, great professors, and philanthropic support. How well Mizzou adapts to the educational landscape of the future will determine how well it competes.

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