



**Board of Directors**

John W. Altman, Chairman  
Richard S. Bray  
Janice Rogers Brown  
Heidi Ganahl  
Paul S. Levy  
Robert T. Lewit  
Michael B. Poliakoff  
Mark Ridenour  
David Bruce Smith  
Stuart Taylor, Jr.  
Stephen Joel Trachtenberg  
Edwin D. Williamson

**Senior Fellow**

Anne D. Neal

**Council of Scholars**

George E. Andrews  
*Pennsylvania State University*  
Mark Bauerlein  
*Emory University*  
Marc Zvi Brettler  
*Duke University*  
William Cook  
*SUNY–Geneseo*  
Paul Davies  
*William & Mary*  
David C. Doughty, Jr.  
*Christopher Newport University*  
Niall Ferguson  
*Stanford University*  
Sydney L. Gulick III  
*University of Maryland*  
Robert “KC” Johnson  
*CUNY–Brooklyn College*  
Anatoly M. Khazanov  
*University of Wisconsin*  
Alan Charles Kors  
*University of Pennsylvania*  
Jon D. Levenson  
*Harvard Divinity School*  
Molly Levine  
*Howard University*  
George R. Lucas, Jr.  
*U.S. Naval Academy*  
Joyce Lee Malcolm  
*George Mason University*  
Matthew A. Malkan  
*UCLA*  
Michael Podgursky  
*University of Missouri*  
James A. Sellers  
*Pennsylvania State University*

March 4, 2022

Dear Member of the Board:

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni, now in its 26<sup>th</sup> year, has unwaveringly advocated for robust academic freedom and strong protection of campus freedom of expression. It is for this reason that we once more bring to your attention and to the attention of the public the way in which the Princeton administration has violated its own stated commitment to free speech in the matter of Cotsen Professor in the Humanities Joshua Katz. At stake is whether Princeton University will maintain the principles of freedom of expression that it has publicly announced and celebrated.

The administration’s severe and pervasive attacks on Professor Katz following the publication of his July 8, 2020, essay in *Quillette* call out for the intervention of the Board of Trustees. The board’s fiduciary duty of care for the institution requires this.

At a time when “cancel culture” and campus intolerance of intellectual diversity have drawn the attention of the public and of lawmakers, the board’s failure to intervene would seriously jeopardize Princeton’s reputation. Indeed, when no less a leader than former president Barack Obama has decried cancel culture, it is deplorable that Princeton now apparently embraces it at the top level of its administration. (I quote from President Obama’s October 29, 2019, interview with Yara Shahidi: “One danger I see among young people, particularly on college campuses . . . Like, if I tweet or hashtag about how you didn’t do something right or used the wrong verb, then I can sit back and feel pretty good about myself, cause, ‘Man, you see how woke I was, I called you out.’”) Princeton’s cancel culture has arguably gone a step further—into harassment and defamation.

In case the facts of the matter of Joshua Katz are not already known to you, I respectfully call your attention to a few of the key events since July 8, 2020.

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

March 4, 2022

Page 2

In his *Quillette* essay, Professor Katz dissented from several proposals by a group of faculty, proposals that he found, quite plausibly, to be illegal and unethical. The administration's immediate reaction to what Professor Katz wrote was President Eisgruber's condemnation and the statement of university spokesperson Ben Chang that the administration "will be looking into the matter further." To his credit, President Eisgruber retreated from this ostensible threat in his July 20 article in the *Daily Princetonian*.

Despite the fact that President Eisgruber declared in that July 20 article, "Our policies, however, protect Katz's freedom to say what he did," within a few months Princeton, apparently with the blessing of the administration, undermined the commitment President Eisgruber made to free speech.

In a presentation still to be found on Princeton University's website, "To Be Known and Heard," an excerpt from Professor Katz's *Quillette* article is displayed alongside scenes of minstrel shows and the words of the racist scientist William Shockley. Professor Katz's excerpt is held up for harsh criticism from two other Princeton professors in a way that is clearly designed to label him a racist. The words of Professor Katz's article were initially edited to make him appear to be intolerant of black students. This Princeton website presentation, which was produced and disseminated by two Princeton departments and Princeton's Office of the Vice Provost for Institutional Equity & Diversity and the Office of the Vice President for Campus Life may well have crossed the line into defamation. It is important to note that this website is copyrighted in your name, "2021 The Trustees of Princeton University."

The website stands as not only grotesquely unprofessional behavior on the part of the Princeton administration, but it also puts Princeton itself in the position of violating its own rules by severely harassing a member of its academic community whose speech the president declared to be protected. It is hard to imagine that the trustees of Princeton University agree that this vilification of the Cotsen Professor in the Humanities properly represents them and the university. We respectfully advise, therefore, that it is the board's duty to direct the administration to cease and desist from this damaging assault on a member of the Princeton faculty and to tender an official apology to Cotsen Professor in the Humanities Joshua Katz.

Most recently, eight distinguished members of the Princeton faculty, acting as whistleblowers, submitted a formal complaint against this pattern of harassment and defamation to the Office of the Provost. These professors called for a full investigation of the treatment of Professor Katz. Vice Provost for Institutional Equity and Diversity Michele Minter rejected their request. The rejection of this faculty complaint should occasion further alarm among trustees. Although Princeton distinguished itself in 2015 by being the first university to adopt the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression, Vice Provost Minter now claims that the much-acclaimed Princeton rule headed "Statement on Freedom of Expression" (University-wide Regulation 1.1.3) protects a Princeton faculty member such as Professor Katz (or a student) from being harassed for his or her speech *only if* that harassment is "based on a protected characteristic" of the speaker (such as race, creed, color, or sex). This is an obvious, intentional, and dramatically limiting misstatement of the clear language of Regulation 1.1.3. That rule neither contains nor incorporates the phrase "based on a protected characteristic." Vice Provost Minter has taken the phrase from another rule, Regulation 1.2.2, effectively denying Professor Katz the protection due

March 4, 2022

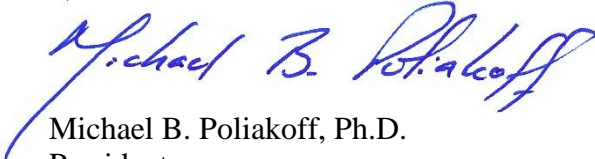
Page 3

him and eviscerating overall Princeton's protection of freedom of expression. If the board does not intervene, Princeton will have made a mockery of its much-touted commitment to freedom of expression: Princeton will have articulated a policy by which those who wish to harass dissenters from campus orthodoxy may do so with impunity. Vice Provost Minter, moreover, denies that the website that defames Joshua Katz is an official representation of the university. This denial is breathtaking in the effrontery of its claim that a website bearing Princeton's trademark and, as noted above, a copyright in the name of the Princeton Board of Trustees is not an official representation of the university.

What we now witness is retaliation, aided and abetted by the Princeton administration, against a member of the faculty for expressing his opinion on a matter of campus politics. As one of the eight professors observed, "We fear that anyone of us can be treated in the same fashion and face similar abuse by members of the University's administration. The danger of retribution which affects all of us will have a pervasive chilling effect on free speech at Princeton." It appears a "red line" has been crossed, and unless the trustees intervene, Princeton will forfeit all semblance of its principles of free expression.

Accordingly, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni recommends that the Board of Trustees launch a full and transparent investigation of the abrogation of the free speech rights of Professor Katz and ensure appropriate redress for the damage that Princeton has done to his image and his role on campus. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni stands ready to advise and help in all ways.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael B. Poliakoff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Michael B. Poliakoff, Ph.D.  
President

cc Christopher L. Eisgruber, President, Princeton University; Deborah A. Prentice, Provost, Princeton University, Jill Dolan, Dean of the College, Princeton University, Gene A. Jarrett, Dean of the Faculty, Princeton University; Cole M. Crittenden, Acting Dean of the Graduate School, Princeton University