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Princeton University Attacks Own Free Speech Rule Through Continuing Mistreatment of Professor of Classics and Cotsen Professor in the Humanities Joshua Katz

Washington, DC—On Friday, March 4, 2022, American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) President Michael B. Poliakoff sent a letter to Princeton University President Christopher L. Eisgruber, Provost Deborah A. Prentice, Dean of the College Jill Dolan, Dean of the Faculty Gene A. Jarrett, Acting Dean of the Graduate School Cole M. Crittenden, and 38 members of Princeton’s Board of Trustees condemning the school’s treatment of Joshua Katz, Professor of Classics and Cotsen Professor in the Humanities.

The [letter](#) reads, in part:

“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. . . .

“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.”

In his *Quillette* essay, Professor Katz expressed strong opposition to a series of illiberal and probably illegal anti-racism proposals under consideration at Princeton in the wake of George Floyd’s murder. At the time, President Eisgruber stated, correctly, that Princeton’s policies on free speech protected Professor Katz’s “freedom to say what he did.” However, in the intervening months, the university has engaged in a systematic campaign to tarnish Professor Katz’s reputation. Personnel within the university went so far as to create and disseminate a freshman orientation video presentation in which Professor Katz is explicitly maligned as a racist. That video continues to be hosted on Princeton University’s website.

ACTA’s letter further states: “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. . . . 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 a distinguished senior professor at Princeton observed in reviewing the treatment of Professor Katz, ‘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.”

A more thorough explanation of Princeton’s treatment of Professor Katz can be found [here](#).

ACTA recommends that the Princeton Board of Trustees launch a fully independent and transparent investigation of the university’s actions and its retaliation against an eminent member of its faculty; instruct the university to remove the scurrilous references to Professor Katz in the online video; and publicly recommit itself to implementing the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression and its own official speech policies.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni stands ready to advise and help in all ways.

Media Availability:

Dr. Michael Poliakoff, president of ACTA

Stuart Taylor, Jr., co-founder of [Princetonians for Free Speech](#) and the [Alumni Free Speech Alliance](#) and a member of ACTA’s Board of Directors

Edward Yingling, co-founder of [Princetonians for Free Speech](#) and the [Alumni Free Speech Alliance](#)

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