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April 13, 2023

Dear Pittsburgh University Board of Trustees:

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is watching with concern reports regarding a series of recent and upcoming events at the University of Pittsburgh on transgenderism.

As noted by the university in its statements on March 8 and March 10, the University of Pittsburgh allows student groups to choose their own speakers and host events. ACTA commends the university for its desire to cultivate "an environment of mutual respect, concern for others, diversity, inclusion, and belonging" and its commitment to "uphold the principles of protected speech and expression." We also applaud the university's view that "student organizations are permitted to invite speakers—including highly provocative ones—to campus without University administration deciding what is acceptable and what is not" and that "while peaceful protest is allowed, it cannot interfere with University events or operations." These statements reflect the university's Student Code of Conduct, which states that a violation is committed when a student or registered student organization "disrupts or prevents the peaceful and orderly conduct of classes, lectures, quiet study, speaker presentations, and/or meetings or deliberately interferes with the freedom of any person to express their views."

**But more needs to be done. ACTA urges the board of trustees to work with the university counsel to create a plan to address potential protests at the upcoming event scheduled for April 18. That plan should include security measures to prepare for, and ideally to prevent, the disruption of the event. We advise the university to videotape the event and the attendees, increase security for speakers and the venue, and publicize specific, severe consequences for those who would violate the prohibitions on disrupting campus events.**

As you are aware, under the Student Code of Conduct, the vice provost for student affairs or his or her designee may make whatever judgements are

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appropriate. The code states, “The University may impose a wide range of Sanctions for Violations of this *Code*. Any of these Sanctions may be used outside of the conduct process as an interim action to help ensure the health, welfare, safety, or educational environment of the University community or any individual member thereof, or to otherwise limit disruptions to the neighboring environments.”

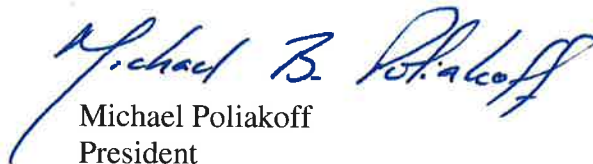
In light of the recent shout-down of U.S. Fifth Circuit Judge Stuart Kyle Duncan at Stanford Law School, the student shout-down of University of Florida President Ben Sasse, and violence against Allison Stanger at Middlebury College, it would be proper for the University of Pittsburgh to let the campus community know now that **suspension or expulsion** will be the likely consequence for a disruption that so violates the principles of the institution.

I would also like to share with you the ACTA Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™. ACTA’s Gold Standard is a blueprint designed to help institutions of higher education commit to a culture of free expression, foster civil discourse, cultivate intellectual diversity, and advance leadership accountability. More specifically, ACTA urges the University of Pittsburgh to express and affirm the deeper principle behind its recent statements—that the university is a place for debate and discussion of ideas, including controversial ones—and to take specific steps to promote this principle within the campus community.

If you would like additional information about ACTA’s Gold Standard for Freedom of Expression™, please contact **Steven McGuire, ACTA’s Paul & Karen Levy Fellow in Campus Freedom, at [SMcGuire@GoACTA.org](mailto:SMcGuire@GoACTA.org)**.

On behalf of ACTA, thank you for your commitment to free expression and intellectual diversity at the University of Pittsburgh.

Warm regards,



Michael Poliakoff  
President