



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF  
UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS  
UW-MADISON CHAPTER

## Threats to Academic Freedom from the Government Threaten American Principles

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The American Association of University Professors UW–Madison Chapter reaffirms the critical importance of preventing government overreach that would restrict the rights of our students to a high quality education that values and encourages critical thinking. When our students are confronted with challenging or controversial topics we encourage and trust that they will engage in critical reflection and determine their own personal beliefs as self-confident individuals. They also have considerable autonomy over the courses they take. The particular course that is being attacked by legislators is not required and students take it because they want to engage with the material.

Earning a university degree is not about indoctrination. Hardworking Wisconsin families make significant sacrifices in order to receive college educations. A high quality education requires students to be confronted with ideas with which they do not agree. In the learning process students develop stronger personal beliefs by being able to identify why they hold such beliefs.

We reaffirm freedom of faculty and academic staff to discuss challenging and difficult concepts and ideas. Freedom of expression and academic freedom are among the values that built our nation and have been defended across the world.

On Tuesday a Wisconsin state legislator issued a statement challenging the appropriateness of a course being taught at the University of Wisconsin–Madison this spring. The legislator threatened the university, stating, “UW-Madison must discontinue this class. If UW-Madison stands with this professor, I don’t know how the University can expect the taxpayers to stand with UW-Madison.”

We respect and encourage public dialogue about the content of courses, particularly from leaders elected by their community to public office. However, threats to the university by government officials related to instructors offering specific courses stifles the free exploration of ideas that has made our nation, state, and university so great throughout history. Further, by calling on UW-Madison to fire Professor Sajnani for his public comments, these legislators ignore one of our most fundamental rights as U.S. citizens: the right to speak freely, as guaranteed by the First Amendment. While it is true that freedom of speech does not mean freedom from consequences, those consequences must not include official sanction from an agency of the government. This is not merely an issue of freedom for academics, but an issue of freedom for all citizens.

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