



INTERNATIONAL  
STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the 7000 member International Studies Association, we write to express our growing concern with the implementation of Senate Bill 17 at the University of North Texas.

Although the law makes specific exceptions for teaching and research, the Integrity and Compliance Office exceeded the mandate by monitoring and censuring faculty syllabi and threatening to restrict the research subjects on which faculty can engage. These actions represent fundamental violations of academic freedom. As defined by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), “academic freedom is the freedom of a teacher or researcher in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in his or her academic field, and to teach and publish findings without interference from administrators, boards of trustees, political figures, donors, or other entities.”

We note, with particular concern, statements of Clay Simmons, the university’s chief integrity

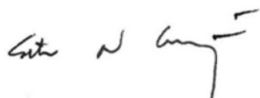
officer, who interpreted the law to link class topics and activities to course objectives. While in principle this linkage is sensible, screening class content by administrators for “legal” compliance creates a chilling atmosphere for teaching and learning and threatens the educational goals supposedly behind the new UNT directive, as it replaces scholarly expertise of the faculty who are best positioned to judge whether material contributes to learning objectives. We note with alarm that reports indicate that the university made 130 changes to undergraduate-course, and 78 changes to graduate-course, titles, descriptions, and syllabi to enforce the new restrictions.

Equally concerning, the compliance office is now insisting that faculty engage only in “true research” which the office defines using rules from the University’s research misconduct policy. Treating viable research as an ethical violation strangles academic freedom, impedes the spread of ideas and growth of knowledge, and damages the reputation of serious academics, who run afoul of the policy. The threat to academic freedom and knowledge acquisition appears, no less, in the compliance office’s guidance restricting research based on its perceived contribution to “generalizable knowledge.” Inasmuch as “knowledge” is “generalizable” by nature, attempts to enforce such restrictions will lead to arbitrary and capricious standards that advantage some topics over others.

Once in place, limitations on “research” produce a creeping expansion in restrictions given the policing of faculty behavior, self-censorship out of fear of retaliation (through the denial of funding, tenure, or promotion), and the many questions that remain unanswered given the ambiguous nature of the mandate.

The combined effects of these restrictions should not be underestimated. Students will lose valuable perspective in the classroom, the university will encounter difficulty retaining and attracting a quality faculty and student body, and the reputation of UNT, as a high-caliber center of learning, will suffer.

ISA is the largest and most respected scholarly association in the field, counting over 6,500 members across over one hundred countries. On behalf of its membership, we call upon the UNT administration to stop its overreach and rescind its “overcompliance” with SB17. Specifically, we call upon UNT to reverse its censoring of course content, and its efforts to restrict faculty research.



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