

Timeline of the Williams College Faculty Petition regarding the Chicago Statement

The following petition was drafted by several faculty members, in collaboration with and inspired by discussions among many, and finalized on October 14, 2018. It was then sent to several more faculty members for review, who gave feedback and signed their names. At the same time, a meeting for a faculty discussion was planned for November 15, 2018.

After the petition had garnered sufficient faculty support, it was sent to all voting members of the faculty on October 29, 2018 by Luana Maroja, Associate Professor of Biology, Steven Gerrard, Professor of Philosophy, and David Gürçay-Morris, Associate Professor of Theatre. Over one hundred members of the faculty had signed by November 5, 2018, representing a range of disciplines and identities. Several faculty voiced concerns by email and in person, and it was planned to have several faculty discussions to allow productive dialogue on the petition and the issues of concern. Plans for student outreach were also initiated at this time.

Apparently, information about the petition and the first planned discussion was shared with students shortly thereafter. The petition was discussed at a meeting with students and President Mandel on November 11. College Council discussed the petition on November 13. A letter to the editor by Cheryl Shanks, Professor of Political Science, was published in the Williams Record on November 14. A student letter was presented to the faculty at the November 15th 4pm meeting, which was read out loud by Professor Gerrard before he presented some brief remarks. Instead of the planned discussion amongst faculty, interested students were welcomed into the meeting. They shared their thoughts about the petition and the issues raised therein. The discussion between faculty and students continued until 6:30pm.

At some point on the evening of November 14 the petition was accessed by an anonymous account, and portions of the text were removed; after discovering this on the evening of November 15, the petition was made inactive.

At no time had the petition been formally delivered to any administrative body of the college, and no formal motion has been prepared for any upcoming faculty meeting. All of the activities were, and remain, in the discussion stage.

Discussions on the core issues of academic freedom and freedom of expression are essential to Williams College, and will continue.

Petition to the Faculty of Williams College

Greetings.

In view of the continuing local and national discussions regarding freedom of expression on campus, several of us think that it is an opportune time to reflect on and clarify our policies and ideas on this issue. While there is an understandable desire to protect our students from

speech they find offensive, doing so risks shutting down legitimate dialogue and failing to prepare our students to deal effectively with a diversity of opinions, including views they might vehemently disagree with.

We believe that Williams College, as an institution of higher learning, must maintain a strong commitment to academic freedom. We further believe that Williams should protect and promote the free expression of ideas. We should be encouraged to use reasoned argument and civil discourse to criticize and contest views we dispute, not to suppress these views and risk falling down the slippery slope of choosing what can and what cannot be discussed.

The [Chicago Statement](#) articulates the duties of institutions of higher learning towards freedom of expression. A version of this statement has now been adopted by many other colleges and universities, including Amherst, Princeton, Smith, and, most recently, [Colgate](#). We believe that *Williams College should affirm its commitment to the principles of freedom of expression and academic freedom as essential to fulfilling its mission and goals by adopting the Chicago Statement.*

If you agree with our concern and this statement, we ask you to please add your name to this petition. If we have a critical mass we will bring this to the president and our fellow faculty members for further consideration.