

**CLAREMONT COLLEGES AAUP STATEMENT  
REGARDING MAINTAINING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND CAMPUS SPEECH RIGHTS  
WITH THE SHIFT TO ONLINE EDUCATION (10/25/2020)**

The Claremont Colleges AAUP affirms that the shift to online course delivery and campus events should not diminish campus speech rights and academic freedom, specifically in regard to faculty autonomy in determining curricular and co-curricular content.

Contrary to this principle that campus speech rights and academic freedom should remain as fully protected in online education as in in-person education, on 23 September 2020, Zoom shut down a class webinar, organized by faculty at San Francisco State University, because of objections to an invited speaker. Zoom’s corporate censorship of this class webinar was immediately followed by Facebook, which had been live streaming from the Zoom feed, and then, within a few minutes, by YouTube, which also had been carrying the feed.<sup>1</sup>

This incident of corporate censorship represents a significant and novel diminishing of campus speech rights and academic freedom, specifically of faculty control over course and classroom content. This, in turn, is a profound threat to the pursuit of educational excellence, which requires academic freedom and faculty control of course and classroom content.

The Claremont Colleges AAUP thus calls upon the administration of each consortium institution to fulfill its responsibilities to protect and foster campus speech rights and academic freedom—and thus the pursuit of educational excellence—by taking these three steps in response:

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant background to the event, and discussion of relevant legal issues, can be found in the following statements from [AAUP’S Academe Blog](#), [Palestine Legal](#), [Jewish Voice for Peace](#), [The Council of UC Faculty Associations](#), California Faculty Association, National Coalition Against Censorship (endorsed by the national AAUP), and the [UCSB Faculty Association](#). In addition, after this chapter statement was drafted, ZOOM censored webinars at NYU and U. Hawaii on October 23 focused on the censorship of September 23; the NYU webinar was co-sponsored by NYU-AAUP. ZOOM also emailed Claremont Colleges administrators informing them that a publicly announced webinar here on October 23, also concerned with the censorship of September 23, was a violation of ZOOM’s “terms of service,” but then did not censor that webinar. Regarding the ZOOM censorship of Oct 23, see this [NYU-AAUP Statement](#) and [Rima Najjar’s report](#), which includes the ZOOM email to Claremont Colleges administrators.

1. Each consortium institution should establish a back-up platform for the online delivery of course content, and of other campus events organized in accord with established campus policies, that will allow a class or campus event to continue should such censorship occur to one of their institution's classes or campus events. The backup platform should be one that has not been subject to corporate censorship.<sup>2</sup>
2. Each consortium institution should contact Zoom and demand that its contract with Zoom be rewritten to prohibit Zoom from censoring or otherwise constraining campus speech rights and academic freedom.<sup>3</sup>
3. Each consortium institution should proactively seek opportunities to work with outside organizations that are working to resist and overturn this new corporate censorship (as by submitting amicus briefs in relevant future court cases).

On behalf of the members of the Claremont Colleges AAUP chapter,

Anne Harley

President of Claremont Colleges AAUP

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<sup>2</sup> Pitzer College has responded to this incident by identifying a back-up platform to Zoom, from Microsoft; Harvey Mudd uses a Google platform as its primary platform for online teaching, but since Google owns YouTube, which censored the event of September 23, this platform should be regarded as no more a site of protected academic freedom and campus speech rights than is Zoom.

<sup>3</sup> Given the observation in note 2 regarding HMC's use of a Google platform, HMC should also contact and make this demand on Google.