

# End of Year Report on the Center for Expanding Viewpoints in Higher Education (2025-2026)

The [Tufts University chapter of the American Association of University Professors](#) (Tufts AAUP) has produced this report as a follow up to our [September 2025 report](#) on the [Center for Expanding Viewpoints in Higher Education](#) (CEVIHE) at Tufts. Our prior report was based on interviews conducted with the Center’s Director Professor Eitan Hersh and with President Sunil Kumar, in anticipation of the Center’s launch. This follow-up report, drawing upon the public-facing events and announcements made by CEVIHE, university leadership, and the Center’s director, provides an overview of the Center’s impact on campus life over the course of its first year.

The AAUP, of which Tufts AAUP is a chapter, represents workers who contribute to the academic mission of universities: faculty at all ranks, teaching graduate students, and others. Key areas of focus for the work of AAUP include academic freedom, faculty governance, institutional transparency, and fair labor conditions—all principles to which Tufts University has also long committed itself.

In our assessment of CEVIHE’s activities this year, our view is that the Center has negatively impacted, and has further potential to threaten, Tufts’ commitment to these key principles. *We make three specific recommendations to mitigate these harms and concerns:*

- 1) **Relocate** the Center from the president’s office [in line with Tufts’s standard administrative protocol for Center and Institutes](#) (by these guidelines, as a “center,” CEVIHE should report to a school dean);
- 2) **Publish** bylaws that delimit the Center’s power to use faculty syllabi without consent, to coerce participation in curricular review, and to bypass ordinary processes for curriculum review that support departmental autonomy;
- 3) **Disclose** the names of donors to the Center, and the members of the Community Advisory Board.

We celebrate the right of the Center to invite speakers from across the ideological spectrum. We are confident that a version of the Center that operates in line with other centers on campus—as a venue for speakers, events, and voluntary participation in cross-departmental conversations—would contribute to a genuine diversity of perspectives on campus. Further, it would do so without contributing to the repression, censorship, and erosion of faculty governance that is the explicit goal of similar “viewpoint diversity” initiatives across the country.

## Background

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CEVIHE is described, in its own materials and in the president’s statements, as a center that seeks to “help” and “assist” the campus community to engage “diverse viewpoints” on “difficult subjects.” However, as noted in our [earlier report](#), CEVIHE’s director has made clear that the aim of the center is to boost the visibility of *conservative* views on hot-button issues drawn from a US political environment in which conservative ideas are politically, economically, and militarily dominant. For example, in its inaugural year, it identified its primary areas of interest in its curriculum project to be “immigration” and “gender and sexuality”: common targets of the culture-war politics of current conservative movements and the Trump administration’s attacks on universities.

So-called “[viewpoint diversity](#)” is a broad movement originating [in the early 2000s](#) and long championed by [conservative think-tanks](#), that is in part aligned with the national [campaign to harass](#) (and in some cases, [to fire](#)) faculty with [political views out of line with those of conservative policymakers](#) or whose teaching on topics such as gender and sexuality, or immigration, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are at odds with conservative aims, and which seeks to [coerce universities to grant the federal administration](#) unprecedented levels of control over curricula and research. While different organizations in the movement advocate different tactics, broadly they promote moves to undermine faculty governance and to empower administrators, [trustees](#), legislators and outside monitors to limit the range of critical and free inquiry at universities.

The movement has been promoted in state legislatures of republican-dominated states. As the [New York Times reports](#), “Calls for viewpoint diversity have been written into education laws proposed or passed in at least seven states, including [Florida](#) and [Texas](#). In March, Indiana [passed a law](#) that curtailed diversity, equity and inclusion programs, while mandating that professors be regularly evaluated on whether their courses promote ‘intellectual diversity.’ Failure to do so can be a firing offense, even for tenured faculty.” The movement identifies the imposition of changes to teaching through so-called curricular review and reform, and [ultimately control over hiring and promotion](#), as its primary aims.

Indeed, the conservative Manhattan Institute [published a blueprint for the project](#) that makes these goals explicit. The Manhattan Institute paper calls for trustees to take over university governance and to become involved in the details of matters such as promotion and hiring, so as to change the face of faculty at universities. As that report argues, “Legislators and board members have for too long yielded their rightful control over intellectual matters to the faculty and administration. They should take back their power, resisting the cacophony of complaints by entrenched interests that will assuredly result.”

[In 2023, the AAUP](#) noted the following concerns with according viewpoint diversity (or, viewpoint “balance”) the status of an institutional priority, and seem to anticipate some of the dynamics we currently observe at Tufts::

College and university administrators, now sensitive to external attacks, describe the right to hear as a question of viewpoint balance—the idea that students should be able to hear all sides of a debate or all perspectives on an issue. Ironically, in today’s context of coordinated external political intrusion and

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attacks on higher education, **this asserted concern for viewpoint balance is used to restrict certain disfavored viewpoints expressed by faculty members in the classroom and by outside speakers invited to campus.** This puts particular subjects and disciplines at increased risk of administrative interference both in the classroom and in invitations to controversial outside speakers.” (emphasis added)

## **CEVIHE is part of the national movement**

While the coercive and repressive aims of the national “Viewpoint Diversity” movement are well-documented, President Kumar and CEVIHE director Professor Eitan Hersh have consistently claimed that, despite the similarities in framing, Tufts’s version bears no relation to these wider efforts. Reviewing the Center’s founding documents, and its activity in its first year, reinforces our sense that this is not a plausible claim.

We see four major points of overlap between CEVIHE and the broader national framework:

### ***i) CEVIHE is founded on the same faulty reasoning as the Viewpoint Diversity movement.***

Viewpoint Diversity projects such as CEVIHE argue that universities are hostile to conservative students. They frame their own activities as providing “a home” and “a space” for such students, intimating that conservative students feel unwelcome and that they are targets for student and faculty hostility. In part they point to arguments that the professoriate as a whole trends towards the political left. They do not acknowledge [substantive nuancing of this thesis by sociological research](#).

As for student feelings, [Gallup has recently released the results of a poll](#) showing that “Just 2% of all college students, including 3% of Republicans, say they feel they don’t belong on their campus due to their political views.” These data are not new, as conservative social scientist Matthew Woessner [wrote in 2012](#), “our research offers little evidence that conservative students or faculty are the victims of widespread ideological persecution.” Nonetheless, the Center and its director continue to recycle the unfounded claims brought by conservative think-tanks and legislators, to support the idea that there is a pressing need for institutional intervention to achieve some predetermined notion of “balance,” and that this must be aggressively incentivized by the university’s upper administration and trustees.

Current research such as the above-cited Gallup poll in fact affirms what has been established in prior polling: *affordability* is the central issue undermining public confidence in higher education. Tufts has made inroads to broadening access, but must be part of a national movement to address affordability more generally. Only then will public confidence be restored – not by instituting centers that promote narrow political views.

### ***ii) CEVIHE’s curriculum project follows national calls for institutional reviews of faculty courses to police their viewpoint[s].***

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The Center has publicly announced that it has initiated a curriculum project, which was [described by Prof. Hersh in these terms](#), “There are a lot of topics in higher education that are not taught with a very careful eye towards viewpoint diversity. We aspire to create model curricula on a range of topics like immigration, gender and sexuality, and global conflicts, to provide resources to faculty and students around the country to learn about a wider range of viewpoints on these topics.”

The presumption behind the initiative is therefore that Tufts faculty are not able to effectively devise their own syllabi, especially those on subjects that are politically topical. The leadership of the Center has no apparent bona fides in the subjects prioritized for its curriculum project, and evidently the Center sets its own measure for what is “viewpoint diversity.” By all indications, such “diversity” on syllabi indicates the inclusion of materials representing a narrow band of American conservative thought. Thus it appears that the aim of the curriculum project is to intervene in how certain politically charged topics are taught and to infuse these courses with content that include the “viewpoints” that the Center alone believes are missing from the syllabus – notwithstanding the training and accrued experience of Tufts faculty who teach and research these topics.

In response to our questions, Professor Hersh has described the curriculum project as being largely carried out by student interns, with sole oversight by the director himself. He has confirmed that the Center has collected syllabi of courses taught at Tufts, apparently without prior consultation with the faculty whose syllabi have been collected. In correspondence with a group of faculty shared with Tufts AAUP, he stated, “We did gather syllabi from across the country on two specific topics over the [last] summer: immigration policy and gender and policy courses. This was mostly just a matter of googling. The students who looked for syllabi online included Tufts courses in their searches, but it wasn’t particular to Tufts.”

This description is somewhat at odds with the claim that the syllabi project is simply offering a resource that faculty may freely choose to utilize. It remains unclear what if any guardrails exist to protect Tufts faculty who are not interested in having their syllabi used in the Center’s curriculum project, and whether faculty whose syllabi have already been included in this project have been made aware of this. In general, Professor Hersh exhibits a certain disdain for how his colleagues teach; for example [in one interview he asserts of other professors that](#) “they think putting something on a syllabus is tantamount to an endorsement.” In [an op-ed](#) he has published, he complains about “staff and faculty [who] enforce political litmus tests,” and he bemoans that they do not “act more professionally.” This rather negative assessment of his own colleagues may in part explain the non-consultative approach behind the curriculum project.

In an emailed reply to faculty questions, Professor Hersh approvingly pointed to a non-peer-reviewed article, [originally distributed](#) by the conservative think tank the Hoover Institution, by way of explaining the rationale of the CEVIHE curriculum project. The article in question makes the following recommendations:

[W]e suggest that every university that cares about liberal education needs to have a better sense of how it’s actually teaching contentious issues [...]. To that end, universities could simply do an internal assessment of their curriculum. [...] These sorts of curricular evaluations could also become a regular

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feature of academic assessments. For example, such curricular assessments could become part of the external reviews of university departments as well as evaluations for tenure and promotion. On the basis of these reviews, university presidents and deans might reward departments with more hiring lines and resources, when they show a commitment to teaching a broad range of scholarly perspectives.

Through its empowerment of CEVIHE and its curriculum project, Tufts University runs the risk of having made moves towards the adoption of the recommendation of “conducting an internal review” of Tufts faculty teaching in certain topics. It is our concern that, if not limited, this may constitute a first step in a program of assimilation of the further steps not yet taken: making reviews of syllabi part of “external reviews of university departments as well as evaluations for tenure and promotion” or tying administrative support to showing a “commitment to teaching a broad range of scholarly perspectives” – which are narrowly defined by CEVIHE to be conservative perspectives.

In any case, the approach (and the underlying tone) here adopted contravenes Tufts’ own commitment to pluralism, [which affirms](#): “Faculty members are hired for their subject matter expertise. The university contributes to forging values in a pluralistic society by providing a protected space within which its faculty share that expertise and students learn to formulate their own positions and develop the deliberative, persuasive, and conciliatory skills crucial to a smoothly-functioning democracy.” Given this commitment, it is concerning that the president’s office is providing full support to a Center that treats the university’s own faculty and their expertise with derision and which so far unilaterally acts as if it is in a position to devise better syllabi than faculty may do themselves.

***iii) The Center’s events feature national figures in the viewpoint diversity movement and fails to model respectful engagement with those of differing opinions***

As noted above, the AAUP fully supports the activities of the Center to organize events featuring speakers from across the ideological spectrum. Despite the claims of the Center leadership to highlight a range of viewpoints on controversial viewpoints, a review of the events organized this year represent a fairly narrow range of types of speakers, in particular in its marquee events, many of whom have been closely identified with the national movement discussed above. For example, two of the Center’s keynote events featured speakers from the conservative Manhattan Institute (one featuring the institute’s director), which has been a key player in the viewpoint diversity movement.

Given that the Center has positioned itself as modeling to students how to “[construct thoughtful opposing arguments, and remain engaged when disagreement is difficult, unresolved, or uncomfortable](#),” it has been concerning to receive reports of events that feature speakers speaking uncivilly about students or others with whom they have differences of opinion. For example, at one high-profile public forum, the speaker Haviv Rettig Gur stated that protestors (students and members of the community) who peacefully handed out leaflets outside the venue were “[pathetic losers who don’t matter](#),” with cheering from those in the audience who supported him—expressions that were not moderated or counterbalanced at the event. Audience members who disagreed did not experience the event as modeling a respect for other viewpoints.

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To be clear, a speaker's lack of civility does not mean a certain event should not take place. Members of the Tufts community will disagree about which views are worth hearing and how they are to be expressed, and these disagreements are to be welcomed. But CEVIHE's special status as an initiative with the material backing and endorsement of President Kumar and his office, supposedly as a sign of Tufts' institutional commitment to pluralism and "expanding viewpoints," makes this hostility to opposing viewpoints problematic. The association of the Center with the president's office risks sending a repressive message: CEVIHE speaks for Tufts, and those who disagree with its political agenda are *non grata*.

The tone adopted by the speaker of the aforementioned CEVIHE event also appears resonant with Professor Hersh's own tone in [an op-ed](#) he published in the Boston Globe, in which he characterizes students who disagree with him as "woke" and "cringe." The underlying concern here is that directing a center that is charged by the president's office to broaden intellectual engagements on campus requires a disposition of leadership that does not contemptuously ridicule students or members of the community for their views on certain political or social matters. In these ways at least, the Center has so far failed to model respectful and civil engagement with those with whom one disagrees.

***iv) The Center follows national calls to reshape the university through interference in hiring and the institution of new "rules"***

In the aforementioned [op-ed](#), Professor Hersh argues that university "Leadership should try to hire the right people and enforce the right norms" and that the university should "create the right programs and the right rules." He goes on to position the Center as empowered to act in defining these terms ("right people" "right norms" "right programs" and "right rules") by reporting that "we're hiring postdocs who bring heterodox thinking to scholarly fields."

By empowering the Center, through the infusion of significant funding with little faculty oversight, during a period of austerity, it is not surprising that some departments have sought to collaborate with the Center on positions for "heterodox" postdoctoral scholars. Because it wields such extraordinary resources, and bears the special endorsement of President Kumar, CEVIHE has been granted a concerning degree of power to pressure departments into hiring based on a political litmus test of what is "right." Again, what concerns us are the precedents that are being set in which a center located in the president's office commands an agenda for faculty hiring by claiming the unique mantle of designating who are the "right people," what are the "right norms," which are the "right programs," and what are the "right rules."

**Conclusion:**

We have listed our recommendations for alleviating some of the concerns faculty have with the Center at the

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beginning of this document. We end by highlighting the continuing questions and concerns about CEVIHE's place in the university, its remit and scope, and its lack of accountability and oversight:

- Institutional location: It continues to be unclear why the center operates in a manner that is anomalous to other centers at Tufts by being the only one that is administratively sited within the president's office, benefiting from a prestige and authority that other centers at the university do not enjoy.
- Faculty oversight: The Faculty Board of CEVIHE has not as yet engaged the broader faculty. How will this board fulfil the mandate [President Kumar reported having given it](#), to exercise oversight over the Center's activities and to represent the faculty as a whole?
- Transparency: Tufts refuses to make the names of funders of the Center known, even while the University has advertised—as supposed evidence of the Center's pluralistic commitments—[that its donors come from across the political spectrum](#). Members of a [Community Advisory Board](#) for CEVIHE are not publicly listed, and it is unclear what if any role they have in the direction of the Center. Disclosing the identity of funders and the advisory board would be a major step towards transparency.
- Academic Freedom: in some areas (in particular, hirings and the curriculum project), CEVIHE runs significant risks of impeding on the principles of faculty governance and academic freedom at Tufts. By being identified with the office of the president, departments and programs may experience invitations to “collaboration” as offers that may not be refused.
- Leadership: the leadership of CEVIHE has made at best poor efforts to set a tone of respectful engagement or to seriously allay faculty concerns that have been expressed with its mandate and scope. The one-dimensional mischaracterizations of many faculty (as feckless or biased teachers, for example) and students (as woke activists), has disillusioned and disappointed members of the Tufts community who might otherwise be interested in aspects of a project to broaden the nature of intellectual engagements in a variety of subjects and from a variety of perspectives. Sadly, the modeling of respectful dialogue promised by the Center has not as yet materialized. More troubling still, the Center's tendency to echo talking points used to attack higher education—and doing so with the special backing of the President's office—risks contributing to a [climate of control and censorship](#) in which [faculty and student voices are suppressed](#).

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