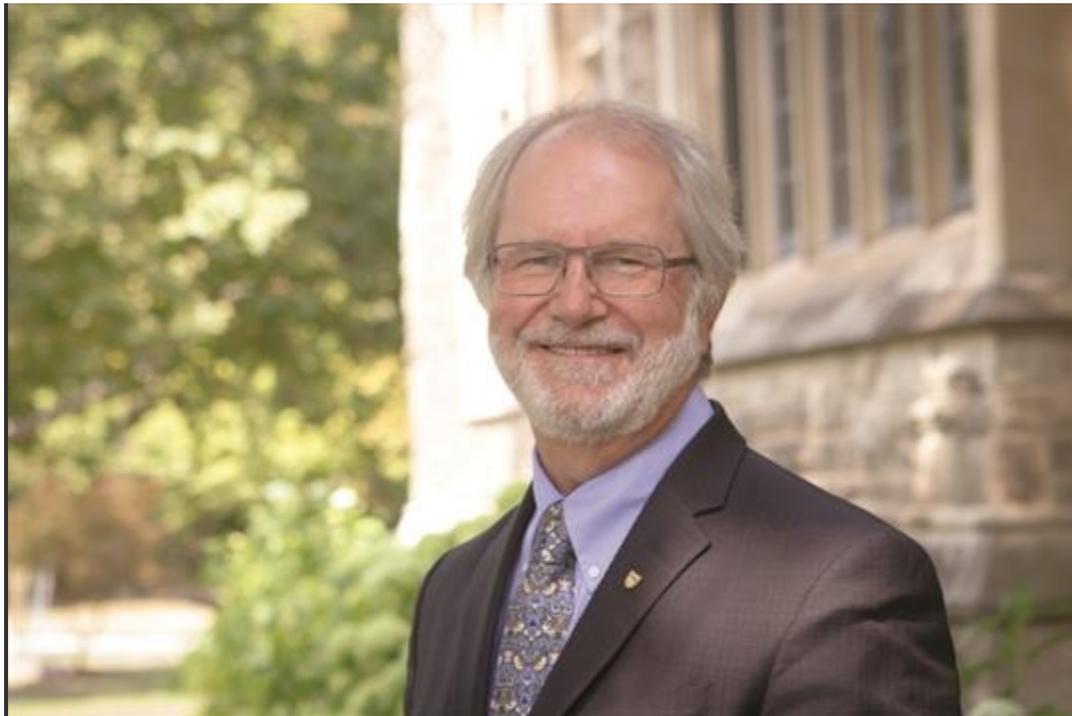


Why we railed against Trump's executive order

Travel ban ignored the hallmarks of a healthy society: diversity, inclusion and openness

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McMaster University president Patrick Deane.

1/2

[Hamilton Spectator](#)
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On Jan. 27, 2017, the White House issued its now notorious Executive Order: Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States. As I write this, the order has been blocked by the courts and theoretically citizens of the seven Muslim-majority countries targeted by the ban are able to enter the United States as before. A new executive order is said to be imminent, however, so it is reasonable to assume that, in one form or another, discrimination on the basis of faith or ethnicity will continue to be an element in U.S. immigration policy under the present administration.

That the issuing of the executive order would provoke protest from civil liberties and immigrants' rights organizations was entirely to be expected. The volume of complaint from the university sector, on the other hand, may have come as a surprise both to the public and to the authors of the order. The American Association of Universities issued a statement almost immediately, noting that the ban "is already causing damage and

should end as quickly as possible," and calling on the administration, "as soon as possible, to make clear to the world that the United States continues to welcome the most talented individuals from all countries to study, teach, and carry out research and scholarship at our universities." Scores of institutions — including most of the country's leading universities — also posted individual statements expressing grave concern about the direction of American immigration and border policy.

Here in Canada, reaction from the academic sector was also immediate and followed a similar pattern: Universities Canada led the way, with institutions across the country subsequently releasing their own declarations. Interestingly, on both sides of the border these communications frequently drew attention to their own exceptionalism. Thus, "Universities Canada does not typically comment on executive action being taken by another country, but we do so today because of the real impediment this new executive order poses to the free flow of people and ideas and to the values of diversity, inclusion and openness that are hallmarks of a strong and healthy society."

That last sentence summarizes very well why the executive order has triggered such a vehement response from the academy. The sequence tells it all: the "hallmarks of a strong and healthy society" — diversity, inclusion and openness — are essential to the effective functioning of any and all institutions in a democracy; but it is "the free flow of people and ideas" on which the life of any great university specifically depends. Parochialism and protectionism are the enemies of enlightenment, progress and discovery, and no institution can expect or continue to be great if it is walled off from the rest of the world. That is precisely why America's finest universities spoke out so quickly and with such force on this issue.

Inclusion and openness are not merely desirable conditions for the prosecution of the academic mission, they are for historical reasons essential to it. Universities in the West came into being for no other reason than to protect the unimpeded flow of people and ideas that was understood to be a prerequisite for learning and human advancement. In 12th-century Bologna, the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa intervened to protect foreigners who had come together there to study; and out of that moment in history came both the structural model for institutions of higher learning as well as the intellectual concept that must underpin any university worthy of the name — academic freedom. Implicit in that genealogy is the important point that where there is injustice, intolerance or exclusion, there cannot be academic freedom. Universities have therefore a fundamental and essential obligation to oppose bigotry and closed-mindedness in all its forms.

Those young learners in Bologna were called "clerici vagantes," "wandering clergy," and sometimes they were also known as "vagabundi," a name which should help us see more clearly the historical kinship between the students enrolled in our universities, the academics who work in them, and the world's migrant populations. Mobility is what links them all: in the case of refugees the goal is home as a geographical place; in the case of "clerici vagantes," "home" is any milieu in which their curiosity and imaginations can work unfettered for the betterment of humanity. Universities seek to be homes in that sense, but without the free traffic of ideas and the movement of people hungry to engage with the world's problems and to understand the complexities of life, they cannot

properly fulfil their mission. Our universities, like our society, are only enriched and strengthened by diversity of opinions, academic disciplines and people. In recognizing and celebrating that strength, and in responding to those who would seek to restrict it, we commit ourselves even more deeply to the mission of providing a welcoming and inclusive home to scholars from around the globe, to protecting the free flow of ideas and to opposing hatred and intolerance in all its forms.

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