



Statement Affirming the Importance of Academic Freedom within the Classroom

A number of states have recently proposed policies that would limit academic freedom within classrooms. In 2021, legislation passed in more than a dozen states, including Texas and Idaho, that will curtail the teaching of critical race theory and constrain how teachers can discuss current and historical events. In early 2022, [legislation](#) was proposed in Florida that would prohibit the discussion of topics that may make people feel “discomfort” or “guilt,” such as topics related to race, gender, or national origin. The National Communication Association (NCA) strongly opposes these threats to academic freedom and the ability to teach relevant histories and theories, affirms its commitment to academic freedom within the classroom, and calls for policies and legislative acts that strengthen institutional commitments to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.

As the preeminent scholarly society devoted to the study and teaching of Communication, NCA recognizes that professional educators, including Communication scholars and teachers, are best equipped to determine what is appropriate for their classrooms and curricula. Among other theories that plainly acknowledge the histories and impacts of race, Critical race theory (CRT) is foundational to effective communication teaching, learning, and practice. Simply stated: Educators cannot effectively teach communication without teaching about systemic racism and its impact on our institutions and policies, including teaching about CRT and its principles. Students cannot adequately learn about effective communication without exploring systemic racism in the history of the United States. To restrict freedoms to engage in the teaching of, and communication about, CRT and other theories which examine the historical and current impact of their principles is inconsistent with the principles of democracy.

NCA opposes legislation that would censor content within the curriculum or classroom based on political disagreement or contrived controversy, particularly when such legislation curtails or prohibits teaching about the role of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination in the United States historically and today. Prohibiting the discussion of critical race theory or “uncomfortable” topics does not alter the influence of systemic racism in the United States. Such prohibitions only deprive students of opportunities for robust discussions of these critical issues within an environment that is meant to nurture intellectual growth. While such classroom conversations are necessarily challenging, they are well-founded in empirical and philosophical research and can serve to foster the development of solutions to racial and social injustice.

Free and ethical communication is a foundation of American democracy. We call for the clear rejection of policies that threaten democratic practice, including policies that restrict the teaching and discussion of CRT. Curtailing such discussion within the classroom stymies the ability of teachers and their students to build the knowledge that is needed to solve human problems and create a more just society.

—Approved by the officers of the National Communication Association, March 2022