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A 2023 study found that 75% of college students feel free to report their professors if they say something objectionable. Self-identified liberal students were more likely than conservative students to report their professors to the administration. GETTY IMAGES

Student informants spur academic freedom debate

Classroom speech, rights of educators and pupils under scrutiny

Austin Sarat
Amherst College
THE CONVERSATION

Texas A&M University told philosophy professor Martin Peterson in early January that he could not teach some of Greek philosopher Plato's writings that touch on "race and gender ideology."

The university's local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, an organization of professors and academics in the United States, quickly denounced this requirement.

Peterson, in response to his university's direction, replaced the Plato readings with material on free speech and academic freedom.

Silencing a professor from teaching a certain subject fits within what experts have long recognized as encroaching on academic freedom.

In another high-profile incident at Texas A&M in September, a student filmed an exchange with an English literature pro-

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fessor, Melissa McCoul, who was talking about gender identity.

The student said that McCoul was violating President Donald Trump's January 2025 executive order that recognized "women are biologically female, and men are biologically male." As a result, the student told her professor, as seen in her video, "I've already been in touch with the president of A&M, and I have a meeting with him in person to show all of my documentation tomorrow." Her video went viral.

This represents a growing threat to academic freedom: Students who act as informants and police their classes and professors for signs of political incorrectness.

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students feel free to report their professors if they say something objectionable. Self-identified liberal students were more likely than conservative students to report their professors to the administration.

As someone who teaches politically charged subjects, I am very much aware of the need to teach in inclusive ways and respect the diversity of student views. I have also written about how academic freedom is changing, given new external threats and political realities. I recognize that students will play an important role in determining the future of academic freedom.

Academic freedom is not the same as free speech

Academic freedom is a complex concept that is often confused with freedom of speech.

The American Association of University Professors offers one definition: Academic freedom is focused on ensuring that professors can say, teach, discuss and write about any issue within their field, without "interference from

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ILLINOIS

'Billionaire wealth tax' is among proposed legislation

Tom Ackerman
Springfield State Journal-Register
USA TODAY NETWORK

SPRINGFIELD – Since Illinois lawmakers got back to work in January, they began introducing legislation.

We took a look at some of the bills that were filed last week.

Here are a few to keep an eye on.

'Billionaire wealth tax in Illinois'

State Sen. Karina Villa, D-West Chicago, introduced legislation that would establish a "billionaire wealth tax in Illinois," according to a news release sent out by Villa.

The bill aims to protect essential services from looming cuts in federal funding.

Currently, the income tax system largely focuses on wages rather than overall change in financial resources,

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Pritzker, other Democratic governors boycott White House dinner

Hannah Hudnall, Phillip M. Bailey and Joey Garrison

Peoria Journal Star
USA TODAY NETWORK

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker is one of 18 state governors who say they will boycott a White House meeting with President Donald Trump after he signaled he would exclude two of their colleagues.

The dinner hosting the National Governors Association, a nonpartisan group made up of all 50 state leaders, is set to take place in Washington from Feb. 19 to 21. Here's what we know.

Why are Democratic leaders boycotting National Governors Association dinner?

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore and Colorado Gov. Jared Polis were disinvented to the historically bipartisan gathering.

In a statement to USA TODAY, Democrats blasted Trump's decision, say-

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