

## Strong Opposition to Institutional Neutrality

22 november 2024

Dear Provost Genco, Professor Johnstone, Vice Provost Ryan and Members of the Committee,

We write to express our unequivocal opposition to the adoption of a policy of institutional neutrality at Tufts University. At a time when fundamental rights, academic freedoms and the values of higher education are under attack, neutrality is not only an inadequate response — it is a dangerous one.

A stance of neutrality runs counter to Tufts' mission as a student-centered research university dedicated to the creation and application of knowledge. Tufts has committed itself to fostering transformative experiences for students and faculty in an inclusive and collaborative environment where creative scholars generate bold ideas, innovate in the face of complex challenges and distinguish themselves as active citizens of the world. How can we generate bold ideas or prepare students for active global citizenship if the university refrains from engaging with the very issues that define our time?

Neutrality also undermines Tufts' identity as an interdisciplinary university of creative scholars who profoundly impact one another and the world. A policy of neutrality suggests disengagement from the pressing challenges that shape the broader society — inequality, climate breakdown, and threats to democracy — thus eroding our ability to push the boundaries of teaching, learning and research. Far from fulfilling our mission, neutrality risks alienating those who look to Tufts for leadership and inspiration in addressing complex global challenges.

The lack of diversity within the working group raises broader concerns about how well its recommendations will reflect the needs and values of the entire Tufts community. The absence of SMFA representation, for example, risks excluding voices from a school whose distinct perspectives on social justice, creativity and global citizenship could enrich the group's understanding of these complex issues. This omission also highlights a broader issue: without diverse representation across Tufts' interdisciplinary schools, the working group may overlook key perspectives that are essential for crafting a policy reflective of our university's mission. A more inclusive committee would help ensure that any proposed policy is both equitable and responsive to the wide range of viewpoints that define Tufts.

As Michael S. Roth, president of Wesleyan University, argues in [The Neutral Turn](#), neutrality in the current climate emboldens those who seek to dismantle the freedoms and values that higher education depends on. Universities are not passive entities; they are active participants in shaping the intellectual and ethical landscape of society. By adopting neutrality, Tufts would not avoid conflict — it would abdicate its responsibility to defend its mission and its community.

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The [recent statement from studioELL](#) further underscores this urgency, calling for grassroots engagement and solidarity to confront the growing inequalities and authoritarian threats that harm our most vulnerable communities. Neutrality, by contrast, risks signaling complicity with the status quo, which perpetuates harm while silencing those who call for justice and equity.

Neutrality is not a shield from controversy; it is a choice that sends a clear message about the university's values. Will Tufts stand for civic engagement, social responsibility and academic freedom — or will it retreat into silence leaving its community to navigate these challenges without institutional support?

We urge the committee to reject institutional neutrality in the strongest terms. Instead, Tufts should embrace its role as a leader in addressing the urgent issues of our time. This includes standing against threats to academic freedom, protecting the rights of immigrants and marginalized communities and fostering an environment where the pursuit of knowledge and justice are inextricably linked.

Thank you for your work on this critical issue. We welcome the opportunity to further discuss how we can collectively ensure that Tufts remains a beacon of integrity and action in these challenging times.

In Roth's words, *We must not be neutral.*

Sincerely,

SEIU 509 Part Time Lecturer Union Stewards