

Introduction to *Zeal* 3.2

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Since the release of our last issue in October 2024, higher education—indeed, education on the whole, as well as critical thinking, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression—has been under attack in the United States. The visas of over 300 international students have been revoked at campuses across the country as of April 1, 2025, and the president has ended federal funding at universities such as Columbia, Cornell, and Northwestern. According to *The Hill*, “The federal government said funding was taken away from those schools because of either alleged inaction on antisemitism or policies around transgender athletes.”¹ Federal and state governments are now targeting admissions criteria, course content, and academic freedom at large.²

Faced with such urgent crises, we might doubt the importance of writing academic essays, editing scholarly journals, and reading these publications. Yet doing this work underscores how much our scholarship matters and why it's worth fighting for. This issue of *Zeal: A Journal for the Liberal Arts* highlights the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion; the life-changing impact of excellent teaching and mentoring upon our students; and the fundamental need for kindness and joy in the classroom and within academia.

The five Provocations & Occasions essays in this issue use personal motivation and identity characteristics as the groundwork for enacting change in institutions, mindsets, and actions. In their essays, Erin K. Burrell and Beronda L. Montgomery promote equitable and inclusive policies and pedagogies, while Ben Railton relates the multiple outlets available for scholarly research by outlining his own academic output. In an unusual move, we offer two essays by one author, with Darrell Domskey first presenting his much-loved “deathbed story”—told to thousands of incoming college students over the past 20 years—and then exploring the story behind the story. The two forums in this issue delve into the care work inherent in teaching. Sonya Donaldson curates the Transformative Teaching forum on play, wherein issues of social justice, liberation, and pleasure are explored through innovative classroom practices and learning experiences. In the Author Meets Critics forum, Catherine J. Denial's *A Pedagogy of Kindness* is assessed by four diverse respondents, with Denial joining the conversation about kindness toward our students and ourselves.

As editor of *Zeal*, I am heartened by the rigorous, thoughtful writing our contributors produce even during times of great turmoil; by the careful evaluations of submissions for Provocations & Occasions by our peer reviewers; and time and energy expended by our editorial and advisory board members in editing forums for this issue and forthcoming issues. *Zeal* is an open access journal; submissions for the peer-reviewed Provocations & Occasions section may be sent to zeal@kings.edu. I also welcome proposals from our readers for our various forums: Author Meets Critics, Transformative Teaching, Ethics in Focus, Liberal Arts Starts & Circuitous Routes, Powerful Expressions, Overheard in the Academy, and Reappraisals. Full descriptions of these forums may be read at our website: <https://zeal.kings.edu/zeal/about>.

¹ Lexi Lonas Cochran, “Millions in Federal Funding for Cornell, Northwestern Frozen,” *The Hill* (April 9, 2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/education/5240189-trump-education-funding-cornell-northwestern-columbia-harvard/>.

² Liam Knox, “Is Admissions Trump’s Next Higher Ed Target?” *Inside Higher Ed*, April 14, 2025, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/traditional-age/2025/04/14/admissions-offices-brace-federal-scrutiny?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=4c137b0260-DNU_2021_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1fbc04421-4c137b0260-236865490&mc_cid=4c137b0260&mc_eid=eca970d0a4.