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## FREE SPEECH CRISIS AT AUSTRALIA'S UNIVERSITIES CONFIRMED BY NEW RESEARCH

New research released today by free market think tank the Institute of Public Affairs confirms there is a free speech crisis at Australia's universities.

A survey of 500 domestic Australian university students, commissioned by the IPA from independent market research company Dynata, reveals:

- 41% of students feel they are sometimes unable to express their opinion at university
- 31% of students have been made to feel uncomfortable by a university teacher for expressing their opinion
- 47% of students feel more comfortable expressing their views on social media than at university
- 59% of students believe they are sometimes prevented from voicing their opinions on controversial issues by other students.

The survey was of students of all political persuasions - 39% of students supported the ALP, 28% supported the Greens, 14% supported the Coalition, 20% were Other and Undecided.

"The IPA's research confirms there is a freedom of speech crisis at Australia's universities. It confirms the crisis that students and parents experience every single day – but which university administrators are afraid to confront," said Renee Gorman from the IPA.

The survey also found that Australian students want free speech on their campuses:

- 82% of students agreed that students should be exposed to different views, even if those views are challenging or offensive. 86% of Greens-supporting students, 82% of Labor-supporting students, and 82% Coalition-supporting students agreed with the statement
- 2% of students disagreed with the statement that they should be exposed to different views, even if those views were challenging or offensive.

"University administrators need to face-up to the problem and stop letting the tiny percentage of radical anti-free speech students dictate whose speech is allowed and whose isn't," Mrs Gorman said.

This research finds that Australian universities are fundamentally failing their students, many of whom are now turning to social media for their education:

- 58% of students feel they are more exposed to new ideas on social media than at university
- 45% of students believe social media plays a bigger role in shaping their opinion than what they learn at university.

“These findings are an indictment of the state of tertiary education in Australia. The federal government must now ensure future taxpayer funding of universities is tied to freedom of speech.” said the IPA’s Renee Gorman.

“Universities will lose all relevance to society if they cannot ensure free intellectual enquiry and the open debate of ideas,” said Mrs Gorman.

The biggest gap in the survey was not between left vs right, but between boys and girls, with 44% of males saying they have been made to feel uncomfortable by a university teacher for expressing their opinion, compared to just 23% of females.

The research also refutes the idea that free speech is only under threat in arts and humanities faculties, with 40% of science and technology students saying that university teachers sometimes unnecessarily insert political content into courses.

The IPA's research report *The Free Speech Crisis at Australia's Universities* will be released in the coming weeks and builds on the IPA’s previous research including the three free speech audits on campus authored by IPA Adjunct Fellow Matthew Lesh, which informed the federal government's *French Review* into free speech at Australian universities.

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