

**A FILM BY ROBERT ARNOVE AND JACKY COMFORTY
IN COLLABORATION WITH JEREMY HOGAN**

FREEDOMS UNDER ASSAULT

DIRECTORS & PRODUCERS: ROBERT ARNOVE AND JACKY COMFORTY

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: ROBERT ARNOVE, JACKY COMFORTY, JANET STAVROPOULOS, AND MICHAEL MOLDENA

DOCUMENTARY ARCHIVAL FILM FOOTAGE: JEREMY HOGAN | VIDEOGRAPHY: DAVID GUDAITIS | VIDEOGRAPHY & EDITING: JACKY COMFORTY

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Freedoms Under Assault is a powerful full-length documentary that chronicles the systematic destruction of a world-class university and the politically motivated culture war against its faculty over a two-year period. A perfect storm of an autocratic university president collaborating with a supermajority reactionary state legislature following the cultural wars agenda of the White House has effectively curtailed the institutional autonomy of Indiana University as well as shared governance structures, academic freedom, free speech and assembly rights, tenure, and the viability of arts and humanities programs.

The film shows the extent to which a university administration conspired to silence, intimidate, scare, persecute and even exile faculty members accused of violating , absurd, and mean spirited "new rules."

Co-directed and produced by award-winning documentarians Jacky Comforty and Robert Arnove, the 77-minute film artfully assembles footage of daytime demonstrations and nighttime vigils, in-depth interviews with key protagonists, and archival photos to provide a compelling view of how authoritarian regimes across the country and globe are bent on destroying universities as centers critical to the functioning of democratic societies. In turn, the documentary illustrates how repression leads to resistance.

Directors' statements

Jacky Comforty

For 35 years, I have dedicated myself to documenting inclusive education practices and historical events, particularly the holocaust in Bulgaria. I have gathered countless testimonies and observed firsthand the mechanisms of authoritarianism. The ever escalating oppressive practices we have documented in Indiana over the past two years strikingly echo the tactics employed both by WWII and post WWII regimes to silence and intimidate critics and intellectuals, and persecute decent individuals for violation of draconian laws and rules, meant to target and punish dissent.

Filmmakers:



Robert (Bob) Arnove is a Chancellor's Professor emeritus of education. He is an award-winning scholar and filmmaker. His latest co-directed/produced documentary with Susanne Schwibs received the Jury's Choice Award at the San Francisco 2024 SuperFest; was a featured documentary at the Lincoln Center's 2024 Diversity and Inclusion Film Festival; and a selection of the SlamDance 2025 Unstoppable Disability Film Festival with screenings in Salt Lake City, and Chicago.

His latest book is *Talent Abounds: Profiles of Master Teachers and Peak Performers*. A past president and Honorary Fellow of the Comparative and International Education Society, he has been a visiting scholar at universities in countries ranging from Argentina to Australia. Bob has been a teachers union president, a candidate for the U.S. Congress, and the president of an experimental theater company.



Jacky Comforty, is an internationally acclaimed award winning independent filmmaker, oral historian, researcher and author. Specializing in non-intrusive non-scripted documentation of education and socialization. Jacky created his films independently in the United States, Germany, Israel, and Bulgaria. His groundbreaking work is on Inclusive Education and Holocaust Studies. A visionary artist and a captivating multilingual speaker, his directorial work has garnered hundreds of prestigious international honors, reflecting his commitment to excellence and his unique ability to illuminate the human experience.

Writer, director, editor, producer of the award-winning Trilogy about Bulgaria's Jews and the Holocaust *Balkan Jazz* (June, 2024), *Monument to Love*, (2023), *The Optimists* (2001), and *In the Shadow of Memory* (1998), *Step by Step Heather's Story* (1995) and *Through a Glass, Lightly* (1993). Comforty has recently received more than 200 international awards for his film *Monument to Love*. Numerous other past distinctions include the Berlin Festival Peace Prize, the Jerusalem Film Festival's Jewish Experience Award, a CINE Golden Eagle award, the American Association of Museums MUSE award, and the Chicago International Gold Hugo Award.

He is the author of *The Stolen Narrative of the Bulgarian Jews and the Holocaust* with Martha Aladjem Bloomfield. Jacky was Academic Advisor and organizer of an International Conference with The International Institute for Holocaust Research, at Yad Vashem; The Dahan Center, at Bar Ilan University, and the Tel Aviv Cinematheque: *Persecution and Collaboration, Rescue and Survival: New Perspectives on Bulgaria and the Holocaust After 80 Years*, May 2023.

Creator, producer and distributor of the best-selling *Inclusion Series* , Jacky helped implement inclusive practices in U.S. school districts that are used in hundreds of universities around the country. He currently creates educational programs for U.S. universities and institutions while developing collaborative work with diverse scholars and disciplines (see inclusionseries.org.) For documentation of early childhood education around the world , see www.earlychildhoodmedia.org

Jacky Comforty has taught Documentation and Media Creation courses at Indiana University Collins Living & Learning College, and for faculty and graduate students for the School of Ethnomusicology and Folklore.

Awards and Grants

- 2025 Major research grant from Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.
- 2024-25 Balkan Jazz winner of over 25 awards and distinctions in International Festivals.
- 2023-25 Monument to Love winner of more than 200 International Festival awards.
- 2022 Production grant from The Claims Conference for Monument for Love.
- 2019 Research grant from the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture for Monument for Love.2017
Production grant from the Smithville Foundation for The Quest for Best.
- 2017 Production grant from the Starseed Foundation for www.earlychildhoodmedia.com
- 2016 Initial grant from the Starseed foundation for www.earlychildhoodmedia.com
- 2015 Preservation grant by Eugene & Emily Grant Family Foundation The Comforty Archives.
- 2002 Artist-in-Residence in Berlin, DAAD fellowship.
- 2002 Communicator Award, In the Shadow of Memory.
- 2001 Peace Prize, Honorable Mention at the International Forum of New Cinema Berlin International
Film Festival, The Optimists.
- 2001 CINE Golden Eagle, The Optimists.
- 2001 Best Documentary, Hope and Dreams Film Festival, The Optimists.
- 2000, First Prize, Jerusalem Film Festival, The Jewish Experience, The Optimists.
- 1999 Karlovy Vary film Festival, In the Shadow of Memory.
- 1998 CINE Golden Eagle, In the Shadow of Memory.
- 1998 Fellowship, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture
- 1998 Finalist, Jerusalem Film Festival, In the Shadow of Memory.
- 1997 CINE Golden Eagle, Through A Glass, Lightly.
- 1997 Gold Hugo, (Chicago International), Step by Step: Heather's Story.
- 1997 Bronze Apple, National Educational Media, Through A Glass, Lightly.
- 1996 Cultural Fund Grant, Evanston Arts Council.
- 1995 First Prize, Arts: Artists, AAM Muse Awards, Through A Glass, Lightly.
- 1994 Production Grant, Illinois Humanities Council.
- 1993 Media Award, Illinois-TASH for The Inclusion Series.
- 1993 Major Production Grant, Maurice Amado Foundation, The Optimists.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JEREMY HOGAN



State police violently arrested some of the protesters during the pro-Palestine rally in Dunn Meadow in April 2024.



State police violently arrested some of the protesters during the pro-Palestine rally in Dunn Meadow in April 2024.



State police violently arrested some of the protesters during the pro-Palestine rally in Dunn Meadow in April 2024.



Protesters on the edge of the Indiana University Bloomington campus protest the state police while calling for the resignation of IU President Pamela Whitten during a rally in April 2024.



A protester displays a sign at the Indiana Statehouse on Jan. 30 outside the room where Gov. Mike Braun was delivering the State of Indiana speech.



Protesters on the edge of the Indiana University Bloomington campus protest the state police while calling for the resignation of IU President Pamela Whitten during a rally in April 2024.

'Freedoms under Assault'

Documentary film details failed leadership at Indiana University; free showing scheduled October 12 in Bloomington

Connie Shakalis

Special to The Herald-Times



Protesters on the edge of the Indiana University Bloomington campus protest the state police while calling for the resignation of IU President Pamela Whitten during a rally in April 2024. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JEREMY HOGAN

To those planning to attend Indiana University Bloomington, “buyer, beware,” said Robert Arnové, IU chancellor’s professor emeritus of education about “Freedoms under Assault.” Award-winning filmmakers Arnové and Jacob (Jacky) Comforty have co-directed and co-produced the full-length documentary film, to be shown free of charge Oct. 12 at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater. It’s about IU and the changes the university has had during the past several years.

Arnové and Comforty, an international award-winning documentarian, await responses from IU higher-ups. As of this writing, IUB has remained silent. “We sent invitations for interviews to IU President Pamela Whitten and vicepresident for IU Relations, Michael Huber. We did not receive a response from either one,” Arnové said in an email.

“Freedoms under Assault” will show what Arnové, Comforty and others see as the effects of failed IU leadership. Such failures include faculty being compelled to obey and IU’s reducing majors for students and limiting free speech and diversity.

Will you agree with the film?

Not everyone will agree with the film. Some may sigh at professors feeling entitled to seek tenure and to sharing their employer's governing power. Many won't side with professors who balk at being told to relocate to another IU campus in order to keep their jobs. (A policy passed by the IU Board of Trustees this June lets IU require professors to teach at various IU campuses.)

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 2021 through December 2023 saw 2.6 million workers — in a range of careers — displaced from jobs they'd had at least three years.

Some people also may wonder why people choose to work at a public university in a conservative state and then show surprise that policies can and do change.

However, for the many who worry about IU's global reputation, its students being unprepared to work in a speedily changing world, and a state government continuing to limit significant things such as free speech and foreign language programs, "Freedoms under Assault" might bring action.

IU is among the worst colleges in the country for free speech, according to a report released by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

The nonprofit civil liberties organization The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings put IU 255 out of 257 schools surveyed, the lowest ranked public school. It gave IU 43.9 out of 100, basing the score on 12 parts of the survey. IUB received a grade of F. Only Columbia University and Barnard College ranked as lower.

International relations, national security at risk as foreign language programs die

"Reducing major(s) makes no sense," Arnove said. "It means fewer options for students who are likely to be attracted to prestigious specialized academic programs. Banding programs together, for example in foreign languages, might help to save some major languages. It should be noted, however, that very specialized language programs — that may be central to international relations and national security — have been criticized for decades for their low enrollments by the Indiana General Assembly."

Arnove named IU as the top university in the country for Area Studies Programs that serve a large public and that are nationally significant. He said, however, that the federal government has been defunding those programs.



State police arrest some of the protesters during the pro-Palestine rally in Dunn Meadow in April 2024.

"It remains to be seen where alternatives to IUB programs might be accessed somewhere else in the IU system or in a variety of other higher education institutions."

According to the U.S. Department of Education website Foreign Language and Area Studies Program section, “The Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships program provides allocations of academic year and summer fellowships to institutions of higher education or consortia of institutions of higher education to assist meritorious undergraduate students and graduate students undergoing training in modern foreign languages and related area or international studies.”

Aubrey Wright reported for Indiana Public Media WFIU that IU’s Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship has been diminished. Wright said the program’s purpose is to strengthen national security and send students to jobs such as teaching and government service.

The changes will affect IU’s six National Resource Centers: African Studies Program, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Center for the Study of Global Change, Center for the Study of the Middle East, Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center and Robert F. Byrnes Russian and East European Institute.

IU’s Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies promotes IU’s tradition of worldwide action, using multiculturalism in education. Its website says it comprises four departments and more than 20 nationally recognized centers and programs.



A protester displays a sign at the

A protester displays a sign at the Indiana Statehouse on Jan. 30 outside the room where Gov. Mike Braun was delivering the State of Indiana speech.

Good-bye, shared governance, too

Shared governance, which “Freedoms under Assault” also addresses, has long been popular with IU faculty. It’s a reason Arnove came — and stayed — at IU.

But that’s gone, he said, “IU administration in collaboration with the Indiana Legislature has seriously undermined a previously strong tradition of shared governance.”

Arnove said “not providing staff with an important role in formulating policies and practices disenfranchises them.” He believes, too, that IU loses frontline insights, and thus informed judgment, about what works in the classroom.

Arnove and Comforty know they have launched a sensitive and ongoing debate. They know people exaggerate and misrepresent data, particularly when angry. “We tried to make sure that claims about IU and Indiana General Assembly policies were accurate or were qualified,” Arnove said.

“People have known me as an active member of the IU faculty,” Arnove said, “as well as an individual actively engaged in the Bloomington community with the theater community as well as major agencies, such as Middle Way House over a 50-year period.” He is a past or present colleague or friend of many of the people interviewed in the film.

“There was little reluctance to hold back on criticism of what is occurring at IU Bloomington,” Arnove said. Interviewees willingly spoke about current policies they believed are hurting IUB. For some participants, Comforty’s role lent confidence for them to speak candidly. They know him as a disciplined and accomplished documentarian and a 12-year resident of Bloomington.



State police scuffle with protesters at the pro-Palestine rally in Dunn Meadow on the Indiana University Bloomington campus in April 2024. PROVIDED BY JEREMY HOGAN

Education: a business domain that requires your scrutiny

Arnove said higher education, being a multibillion enterprise worldwide, is a financial and business domain that requires the public’s scrutiny.

“For that reason, the present policies moves are really misguided,” he said, referring to policy that disregards knowledge and skills that students will need in order to navigate occupations likely to exist in the future. “So these proposed cuts are going to have a very negative impact on the personal and social lives of those coming to study at IU,” he said.

“My commitment is to public education” Arnove said. “I also have taught in very prestigious private universities (for example, he earned a Ph.D from Stanford University and was a visiting professor there three times.) Doing so, deepened my commitment to stay and teach at Indiana University.”

Comforty said he thinks things are far worse than the IU community is willing or able to acknowledge. He included his voice in the film through the following director’s statement: “For 35 years, I have dedicated myself to documenting inclusive education practices and historical events, especially the Holocaust in Bulgaria. I have collected countless testimonies and observed firsthand the mechanisms of authoritarianism. The escalating oppressive tactics we have documented in Indiana over the past two years starkly echo those employed by World War II and post-World War II regimes to silence critics, intimidate intellectuals, and persecute individuals under draconian laws designed to punish dissent.”

Comforty and Arnove started interviewing people for their film in March 2024, beginning with Senate Bill 202, regarding diversity. Next came the 2024 no-confidence vote by faculty for IU President Pamela Whitten. And there was the April 2024 assaults on and arrests of IU students and faculty — which Comforty said Whitten orchestrated — in campus’s Dunn Meadow Park, where members of the Indiana State Police and IU Police Department appeared during a protest regarding Gaza and a ceasefire.

IUB faculty voted in favor of no-confidence resolutions for IU President Pamela Whitten, Provost Rahul Shrivastav and Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs Carrie Docherty. The Indiana Daily Student (Marissa Meador) reported “with almost 900 faculty attending the meeting, the votes of no confidence passed by huge margins for all three administrators.”

“Each week revealed new abuses of power and misconduct, drawing greater attention to the unfolding crisis,” Comforty said.

How the film might help IU: civic duty

“Freedoms under Assault” is meant to encourage people who care about IU and specific academic programs to donate in hopes of keeping those programs alive. “Voting for who occupies decision-making power over education at the state and national levels is an essential civic duty,” Arnové said.

Arnové suggested that people donate to the arts and humanities programs being threatened.

“They are academic programs that are seriously being undermined now in favor of STEM fields,” Arnové said. “How about adding the Arts to make STEAM, an even more attractive and necessary set of academic programs central to successful professional careers benefitting individuals and society?”

Arnové said IU is trying to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion offices and those programs. He encourages private donations to individual scholarships and programs to expand opportunities for otherwise disadvantaged and marginalized populations.

In the meantime, people still might be interested in attending IUB, Arnové said. Many attractive programs remain, and the campus’ surrounding natural beauty and the vibrant city of Bloomington remain strong draws.

But who will teach future students? “Many faculty — given the increasing attempts to control faculty and punish them for strictly partisan reasons — will want to leave or not come here,” Arnové said. “Faculty do not feel supported by the current IU administration and the Indiana Legislature.”

If you go

WHAT: “Freedoms under Assault,” full-length documentary film. Co-directed/produced by Robert Arnové, and Jacob Comforty, with Jeremy Hogan.

WHEN: 2 p.m. Oct. 12 **WHERE:** Buskirk-Chumley Theater, 114 E. Kirkwood Ave.

MORE INFO: Admission is free of charge with no ticket needed. After the doors open, the public is welcome to enter and find a seat. For more information, call [812-323-3020](tel:812-323-3020).

'Freedom Under Assault' Film Screening Oct. 12 at BCT

A free, non-ticketed film screening will be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, October 12, at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater for *Freedom Under Assault*, a new full-length documentary about how recent legislation by the Indiana General Assembly has impacted Indiana University and its students, faculty, staff, and administration. According to the filmmakers, co-director and producer Robert Arnové and award-winning documentarian Jacky Comforty, the film documents “the lengths to which a university administration is willing to [go to] silence, intimidate, persecute, and even exile faculty members in accord with arbitrary policies and ‘financial emergencies.’”

The film was originally named *Sniper on the Roof*, however, the filmmakers changed the title to avoid any confusion with the recent fatal shooting of controversial conservative political advocate Charlie Kirk. *Freedom Under Assault* chronicles what the filmmakers describe as the “systematic destruction of a world-class university and the politically motivated culture war against its faculty over a two-year period; a perfect storm of an autocratic university president collaborating with a supermajority reactionary state legislature following the ideological agenda of the White House [that] has effectively curtailed the institutional autonomy of Indiana University.”



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Documentary takes aim at how IU has changed under Whitten and conservative lawmakers

WFIU | By [Myah Garza](#)

Published October 8, 2025 at 1:52 PM EDT



File Photo / WFIU/WTIU News

Dozens of Indiana University students were arrested with IU following the national movement of Pro-Palestine protesters on college campuses on April 26, 2024

A new documentary exploring academic freedom and institutional change at Indiana University premieres Sunday at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater.

[“Freedoms Under Assault”](#) chronicles what its creators describe as a “perfect storm” of legislative action and university leadership decisions that they say have reshaped IU’s governance and culture.



The film is directed and produced by Robert Arnove, an IU Professor Emeritus, and Jacob (Jacky) Comforty, an international award-winning documentarian. The longtime friends began documenting events in early 2023 amid growing debates over academic freedom, faculty governance, and state legislation affecting higher education in unprecedented ways.

Arnove, who joined IU in 1969, said the film was motivated by Senate Enrolled Act 202 (SEA 202), which he views as threatening the university's institutional autonomy, tenure protections, and free speech. He said the legislation, along with subsequent bills and administrative actions, has created what he calls an "existential threat" to the university's traditional values.

"We want people to see what's happening and how those affected are speaking out," Arnove said. "Universities play a critical role in maintaining democracy, and that role can be quickly diminished unless defended from within and from without."

Indiana's Republican lawmakers have said they were combating IU as a publicly funded institution where conservative ideas are unwelcome, and students are immersed in the faculty's liberal politics.

As they gathered interviews and footage, the filmmakers said patterns emerged raising broader concerns about free expression and faculty rights.

Arnove drew parallels between authoritarian regimes abroad and the U.S. today.

"There is an attempt to undermine universities as centers of critique of dogmas and unpopular policies and as agencies of the democratization of society," he said. "This is part of an agenda moving toward dictatorship that's occurring right now in our country — also sending troops into cities."

Comforty pointed to IU's use of the State Police during campus protests as a central example.

"Calling in the State Police was not an emergency for the university — it was an emergency for the president's career," he said. "She used violence to show strength, and in doing so, victimized hundreds of people. This film is an alarm. It represents something unacceptable. We should fight it — be courageous enough to stand up to any



Arrove added, “Two things are very important to fighting against the rise of authoritarianism: a free press and a free university.”

The filmmakers describe “Freedoms Under Assault” as a chronological record of the past four years, weaving together interviews with faculty, students, and community members, along with excerpts from public meetings and media coverage. The project aims to document ongoing changes and encourage public discussion.

Arrove also critiques what he calls “anticipatory compliance,” where institutions preemptively limit speech or adjust policies in response to political pressure.

“You don’t engage in anticipatory compliance,” he said. “You start to stop giving away the university piece by piece.”

The film situates IU’s story within a national context, drawing parallels between state-level legislation and broader trends of political interference in higher education. Arrove and Comforty point to developments during the Trump administration and critique current IU leadership under President Pamela Whitten, whom they say has centralized power and weakened shared governance.

Comforty said the title reflects not only threats to academic freedom but also to institutional transparency and democratic governance.

Despite extensive reporting on IU’s leadership and faculty relations, the filmmakers believe their visual approach adds a new perspective by capturing the voices and expressions of those directly affected in a timely, sequential narrative.

The premiere screening begins at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater, 114 E. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington. Admission is free, and no ticket is required.



Myah Garza

Myah Garza is a reporter with WTIU-WFIU News and recent graduate of Indiana University. She double majored in psychology and journalism with a concentration in reporting and writing.

[See stories by Myah Garza](#)



WFIU

All Things Considered

Chronicles of Indian(i)a: DIY reality for admin, consequences for the rest of us



Deborah Cohn

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5 min read · Sep 24, 2025



A. So, to recap, for those of us living in/who are still subject to what most people would consider a fact-based reality, the last year in Indiana/at IU has brought the following signature accomplishments (seriously streamlined and selected from a long list):

April 2024: the first of a series of votes of no confidence against IU's president (93%), provost (92%), and vice provost for faculty and academic affairs (75%); ten days later, the president brings Indiana State Police to campus (twice). ISP position snipers on the roof of the IMU and arrest 56 faculty and students.

Spring 2024: SEA 202, courtesy of the state's R supermajority, requires instructors to "foster a culture of free inquiry, free expression, and intellectual diversity" and "expose students to scholarly works from a variety of political or ideological frameworks." Instructors who are seen as violating

this may be reported, investigated by their uni, and, potentially, sanctioned. IU overcomplies with the law and sets up an anonymous reporting system that allows anyone to file reports, which makes it impossible to conduct a proper investigation.

August, 2024: the university implements a Board of Trustees-approved expressive activities policy. The policy is so overbroad and repressive that several IU colleagues and the ACLU file suit against the university, which ends with a district court finding, in June of 2025, that it “likely violates the First Amendment” (<https://www.aclu-in.org/en/press-releases/court-halts-indiana-universitys-expressive-activity-policy-over-first-amendment>).

April, 2025: the R supermajority passes HEA 1001, which, among many other noxious qualities, requires faculty to be reviewed and deemed productive every five years — or put on probation and, potentially, terminated. IU again overcomplies with a time-consuming “process” and by deeming faculty unproductive and subject to probation/termination if they have “sustained violations of applicable state and federal law and/or Indiana University policies and procedures.” This law in effect kills tenure at public universities in the state.

Sept. 2025:

- FIRE releases its 2026 College Free Speech rankings: IU is #255 of 257 — the lowest public university in the country
- IU is named the #19 party school in the US

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B. Upper administrators, in contrast, seem to be blissfully untethered to reality. They are women and men “behind the curtain” who call rosy pictures of the university into being (so they think) by merely uttering them:

- the president has made no public statements and/or communicated with faculty and/or parents about the massive changes wrought by 1001. Departments and degree programs are literally being eliminated en masse, but the silence from upper administration is deafening — with the exception of vacuous emails from the Office of Student Life that urge parents to buy tickets to the family weekend game against Illinois because “we’re in our “football school” era.” Glad they’ve got their priorities straight.
- Sept. 15: after having basically told us that there is no money for new jobs, staff, or other amenities (with the exception of a growing number of VP’s for finance of indeterminate job description) deans send messages to the faculty telling them that the “Provost and Chancellor are interested in supporting ongoing efforts to elevate the academic profile of the IUB campus” and asking for the names of “outstanding prospective faculty candidates who have demonstrated, or have the potential to demonstrate, transformative scholarly impact” whom they might try to lure to IUB with the promise of hemorrhaging morale, the recent 10% cut in uni contributions to retirement accounts, and tenure that de facto no longer exists. This is, of course, exactly the kind of state/uni that a member of a national academy and/or someone who has received a MacArthur or other top-level fellowship will want to rush to join. The deadline: two days later — EOB on the 17th.

Sept. 23: the message of the day from IU's provost is titled (without a hint of irony, let alone awareness that the ship has already sailed) "Building for what's next: Investing in faculty and the future of IU Bloomington" (<https://provost.indiana.edu/news/2025/09-23-from-the-provost.html>). (Drivel-laden) Highlights include:

"Meeting this demand [e.g., largest entering class] while advancing our academic mission and expanding our research enterprise requires bold, sustained investment in the people who make IUB thrive: our faculty." Glad they've noticed — could they show us that with actions?

"[Newly-hired faculty] are helping meet immediate teaching needs while also strengthening our academic community across all disciplines, building long-term capacity for research, mentorship, and leadership — and ensuring IU Bloomington continues to grow in both excellence and impact." (Side note: said "long-term capacity" is pretty much only as good as the tenure that guarantees it. Oops. Additionally, the hiring breakdown of 239 tenured/tenure-track faculty to 392 non-tenure-track faculty whose positions are precarious as well as undercompensated does not speak well of their willingness to invest in the campus's future.)

"As we welcome new colleagues through this initiative, we are also building the conditions for faculty success — through interdisciplinary hubs, enhanced research infrastructure, and ongoing support for faculty development and student engagement. We recognize the continued challenges ahead and value the engagement of all faculty as we shape IUB's academic future together" — pure pabulum. The university has been silent about the loss of one of the most important "conditions for faculty success" — tenure — while increasing the workload with meaningless and unnecessary post-tenure review processes, not replacing staff, and so on. As

far as I can tell, “ongoing support for faculty development” means “more meetings about how to complete the tedious post-tenure review and about the new legislation that threatens our degree programs, departments, jobs, etc.”

“We are making progress in areas such as experiential learning and interdisciplinary education — all centered on supporting our students and empowering our faculty” — these areas may be of interest to students, but there is no way that they “empower our faculty” (for reasons detailed here and in all of my previous posts).

“Here’s to a strong semester ahead — and to the faculty who will help shape what comes next” — well, with this administration, that would be a first.

- Sept. 18 (but shared 9/23): a video, “Cheering on Hoosier Nation” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIppqYkWn1m8>) in which the president “shares how athletics can bring us together as one IU family”: “I’ve told people this for years, when you’re a football school, people talk about football all year long. If you’re talking to anyone about IU, you’re hearing about football.” This, in effect, is her survival strategy: for the first time in over 20 years, this year and last year, IU’s football team is winning, and as long as that is happening, there can be votes of no confidence, snipers and arrests, gutting of degree programs, evisceration of tenure, but it’s all buried under the fact that “If you’re talking to anyone about IU, you’re hearing about football.”

Indiana University

Sea 202

Hea 1001

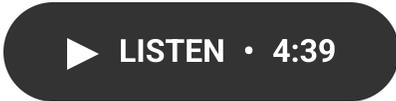


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Be very, very quiet: IU's Elmer Fudd approach to transparency

WFIU | By [Ethan Sandweiss](#)

Published October 3, 2025 at 3:35 PM EDT



Devan Ridgway / WFIU/WTIU News

IU President Pamela Whitten and Former Board of Trustees Chair Quinn Buckner. Since she spoke with WTIU in July 2024, President Pamela Whitten hasn't given any interviews that might include tough questions.

Indiana University has faced unprecedented challenges from the government and internal conflict. But despite changes affecting the lives of tens of thousands of students, faculty and staff, the university continues to make most important decisions



Since [she spoke with WTIU in July 2024](#), President Pamela Whitten hasn't given any interviews that might include tough questions. Her media appearances have been mainly on [industry podcasts](#) and small stations such as [WAMW's Morning Shakeup](#) in Washington, Indiana.

Here's part of how it went with the Morning Shakeup:

Host: "Go Hoosiers! We're excited about the upcoming football season."

Whitten: "You should be excited. We're going to be competitive, I tell you."

[IU received](#) more than \$633 million in state appropriations and \$536 million in federal grants in financial year 2024, [the last for which data is available](#). It received more than \$183 million in gifts, many from its [hundreds of thousands of alumni](#). It employs [more than 41,000 workers](#) and enrolls [almost 90,000 students](#). With that comes obligations, said Ross Mugler, interim president and CEO of the [Association of Governing Boards](#).

"Especially at a state institution, we have a responsibility to the state to provide information in a timely, accurate manner," he said.

President Whitten and Board Chair David Hormuth declined to be interviewed for this story. Mark Land, a former IU spokesperson and trustee candidate, thinks the university would benefit from being more accessible.

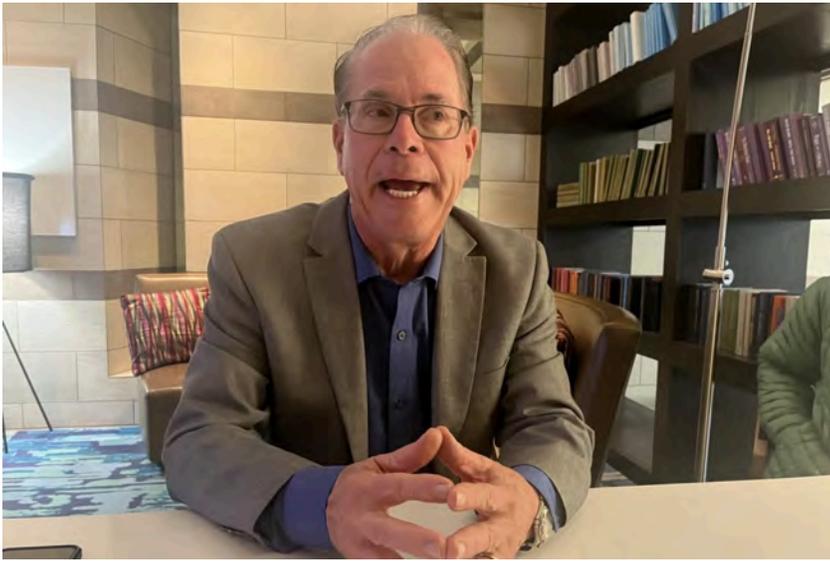
"To have the leader of the institution not be heard, to be heard very infrequently, I don't think it does the institution any good," he said.

As a public institution, the university has an obligation to Indiana taxpayers who provide millions every year, to students and parents paying tuition, and to faculty and staff who seek reassurance in the face of political pressure and economic instability.

The board of trustees hired Whitten in 2021. That process itself was never openly explained.

Since then, the number of unexplained decisions and unanswered questions has continued to grow.





Indiana Capital Chronicle

Ind. Gov. Mike Braun discounted the value of an IU degree. The university had no response.

Silence on the statehouse

In the face of widespread attacks on higher education, IU isn't telling its side of the story.

Many of the attacks are coming from the statehouse. When lawmakers proposed a bill that would [cut hundreds of degree programs, IU remained silent](#). When they added last minute changes in the state budget [ending faculty government and trustee elections at IU specifically](#), the university wouldn't say whether it was consulted, let alone where it stood.

"Even if the answers are what they think somebody is not going to want to hear, just provide the answer," Land said. "Right, wrong, or indifferent, if people ask a question they deserve an answer."

IU's status as a public university does put its leaders in a difficult position. It receives around 13 percent of its budget from state appropriations.

"It's hard to disagree with the governor when you're a university president, because you know they hold the keys to the funding," Mugler said.

But IU leadership's silence didn't spare the university from a [\\$60 million cut in state funding](#), and soon after the session Gov. Braun publicly questioned the worth of an IU



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Be very, very quiet IU's Elmer Fudd approach to transparency



“All the other universities seem to have more value in terms of the education they're giving us for the cost,” he told reporters.

IU declined comment. In June, Braun exercised his new power to [fire the elected trustees](#). Purdue still has three.

When IU shuttered its DEI office after a new state law, [it refused interviews but offered a general statement](#) about ensuring every student's success. And when lawmakers told institutions they [could fire professors for not meeting productivity standards](#), IU stayed quiet despite Whitten's [earlier public support for tenure](#).

These are just events from this year. Since 2022, state politicians have defunded the Kinsey Institute, [accusing it of harboring pedophiles](#), and [suggested revoking the medical license of a faculty member](#) who performed an abortion on a 10-year-old.

IU defended its faculty [only after weeks of public attacks](#).

In the case of Kinsey, the university waited until after the state stripped its funding and it still [did not refute the lawmaker's unsubstantiated claims](#).

IU then [announced it would sever Kinsey into its own nonprofit](#) two weeks before the



the university was unable to answer their questions. Trustees [postponed the vote](#) after campus protests.

"I'm someone who has represented institutions, including IU," Land said. "I think we are better served as a society when we communicate more, rather than less."



Ethan Sandweiss / WFIU/WTIU News

At a Day of Action protest in February 2024, demonstrators created a giant paper mâché foot to represent IU and the statehouse treading on academic freedom. They tickled it away with green feathers.

Speech and security

When war broke out between Israel and Hamas in October 2023, IU began to identify security threats wherever activity related to the war took place on campus.

In December of that year, IU's Eskenazi Museum of Art [canceled Palestinian alumna Samia Halaby's art exhibition](#), which was three years in the making. The university said it couldn't guarantee security. A representative for Halaby [said IU did not elaborate on those security concerns](#) or take up her offers to discuss them.

That same month, IU [suspended the faculty advisor](#) of the Palestine Solidarity Committee for a room reservation error when he helped arrange a talk by Israeli anti-Zionist author Miko Peled. The university canceled his initial request and denied a second one, saying it needed more time to provide adequate security.

Despite suspending Abdulkader Sinno from teaching, [the university did not show Sinno](#)



support for academic freedom.

The university blocked pro-Israeli speech, too. In March, IU asked Hillel, a campus Jewish organization, to [cancel a speech by Mosab Hassan Yousef](#), a Palestinian informant for Israel whose comments have drawn accusations of Islamophobia.

IU said it received credible information from the FBI involving threats from an unlikely combination white supremacists and pro-Palestinians activists. But the Anti-Defamation League [accused it of caving to intimidation](#).



File Photo / WFIU/WTIU News

A protester arrested by state police in Dunn Meadow, April 2024.

Dunn Meadow

Things came to a head in April 2024 when IU responded to a planned pro-Gaza encampment in Dunn Meadow by changing its expressive activity rules the night before, [without inviting student and faculty representatives as required](#) or [providing the protesters adequate notice](#). President Whitten would later say she feared the encampment would become a [“magnet for those making threats of violence.”](#)

Over two days police arrested more than 50 protesters, mostly IU students and faculty, on trespassing charges that [the prosecutor's office](#) called “unconstitutional” and [even the Superintendent of the ISP admitted](#) was largely for unpopular but constitutionally protected speech.



While images of a police sniper on a campus rooftop [circulated in the national media](#) and protesters dug in for [a 100-day occupation](#), Whitten disappeared from public. Aside from appearing at commencement, she avoided events and social media. IU declined interviews from local and national outlets, preferring to communicate only through written statements.



Ethan Sandweiss / WFIU/WTIU News

A Board of Trustees meeting at Henke Hall.

Secrecy on the Board of Trustees

Bloomington faculty [cited IU's "failure" to stand up publicly](#) against statehouse attacks, as well as its silencing of Halaby and Sinno, as grounds for a vote of no confidence in April 2024 against Whitten. [The vote passed by 93 percent.](#)

The Board of Trustees [put out a statement](#) supporting the president, saying: "We, the Board of Trustees, stand united in our confidence in President Whitten."

Except they weren't united. Trustee Vivian Winston found out only after the statement had been released and said she would not have signed off on it.

"A couple of hours later, they said, 'Oh, Vivian, you wrote a statement,'" Winston said. "I said, 'No, I didn't. I've been right here.' They said, 'Looks like you did.' And then then it went downhill from there."

Two months later, Winston [emailed a statement to WFIU/WTIU News](#) disavowing the



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to address concerns about the “general lack of transparency,” saying recent actions by the administration had put the university’s reputation at stake.

Although Mugler thinks trustees should speak as one voice in public, he said, “It certainly is the right of individual trustee to speak out if they feel like something has gone awry like that.”

Winston thinks there were other trustees who weren’t consulted, but so far none have come forward.

It wouldn’t be the last time Winston said she was blindsided. When the board extended Whitten’s contract and raised her salary last February, it did so [without notice](#). Winston only learned what she was voting on the morning of the meeting.

“I had the feeling that I was the one lone person there who had not been told beforehand,” she said.

The board has increasingly held closed-door executive sessions to discuss university business. While it is allowed to hold secret discussions on topics such as pending litigation and labor negotiations, the Indiana Public Access Counselor has found it [in violation of Indiana’s Open Door Law twice in recent years](#).

Trustee agendas have shared little information about what will be voted on and discussed. One example: [neglecting to mention the creation of a new leadership position](#) for the Bloomington campus. In June, when the board updated IU’s expressive activity policy, it didn’t share the amendments [until after the meeting](#).

At his first meeting as a trustee, Braun-appointed James Bopp Jr., a prominent conservative and free speech advocate, questioned the board’s way of operating and urged transparency.

“The proposals that came to the trustees should be made public so that people can look at them, comment, be engaged, and then we would have a committee system that would consider those,” he said.





Devan Ridgway / WFIU/WTIU News

Whitten at the June 2024 Board of Trustees meeting after her eye surgery.

'I pledge to listen and learn'

After the 2024 vote of no confidence, Whitten told faculty in an email that the university could only succeed "if we communicate with honesty and compromise."

She added, "I pledge to listen and learn. I will weigh the guidance from faculty council and the participation of the campus community through shared governance to achieve our collective vision of a thriving campus."

Whitten announced listening sessions with faculty from the various schools at IU Bloomington.

"I have to give her a lot of credit for this, because this could not have been easy," Winston said.

In audio leaked to the press, professors were direct, at times antagonistic, toward Whitten, [voicing frustration at her administration's lack of transparency](#), among other grievances. Some professors leaving the meeting [described her responses](#) as "vague."

Whitten canceled the remaining listening sessions [due to a planned eye surgery](#). They were not rescheduled.

At the next trustee meeting, Whitten announced changes.



Her solution was to create two new administrative positions to serve as intermediaries between herself and faculty in Bloomington: [a campus chancellor](#) and [a faculty fellow](#). Trustees also announced an independent review of campus climate, which they never conducted.

Despite its promise of transparency, the administration became more secretive in 2025.

In March, the university fired tenured cybersecurity expert XiaoFeng Wang and his wife, IU libraries employee Nianli Ma, [the day federal law enforcement searched their homes](#).

Neither Wang nor Ma was charged with crimes, but a colleague of Wang's says IU fired him based on a relatively minor and inadvertent violation of research protocols.

In court, Wang said IU's silence has [irreparably damaged his reputation](#).

The trustees also passed IU's new operating budget, offsetting \$100 million in state and federal cuts with reductions to retirement contributions and unspecified other cuts. For more than three months, [IU withheld the budget](#), despite the state requiring it to be public.

"Delays in areas such as budget disclosures and crisis communications or other board decision making can erode the trust and create uncertainty across the institutions," Mugler said.

On Tuesday, IU finally released its official budget, but [with far less detail than previous years](#). WFIU/WTIU News reached out to IU asking for a more detailed explanation of the changes. It is waiting for a response.



Ethan Sandweiss

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