Statement for hearing before the Select Committee

My name is Lisa D. Brush and I am the current President of the United Faculty of the University of Pittsburgh, Pitt’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors. I have been on the faculty at Pitt for 10 years. My primary appointment is as Associate Professor of Sociology, and I hold a secondary appointment in Women's Studies. My earned doctorate, in Sociology, is from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My qualifications to provide comments on the protections for academic freedom at Pitt include service on committees across Arts & Sciences related to hiring, evaluating, promoting, and rewarding excellence in teaching and research for faculty colleagues, graduate students, and undergraduate students. I want to thank the Select Committee for this opportunity to address the important issues before it.

Resolution 177 sets out 3 areas of concern. I will address them all, but in the interests of time I will group them somewhat differently (items 2 and 3 in the Resolution overlap significantly, so I treat them together as issues of academic integrity).

First (and this addresses items 2 and 3 in the Resolution), measures and procedures to ensure academic integrity, and to adjudicate any violations or disputes, are well-documented and equitably enforced at the University of Pittsburgh. In my experience, the mechanisms currently in place provide fair and timely remedies. The University of Pittsburgh’s policies on academic integrity –
and the University’s statements of the responsibilities and rights of both students and faculty – are readily available. The procedures are clear and specific enough to ensure fair application across a diverse set of circumstances. They are also flexible enough to deal with individual cases in a sensitive and constructive way. The Select Committee can rest assured that academic integrity in the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research is well-protected. Freedom of inquiry thrives in classrooms, study groups, laboratories, workshops, and studios at Pitt.

Second (and this addresses the point numbered 1 in Resolution 177), faculty are indeed hired, fired, promoted, and granted tenure based on professional competence and subject matter knowledge. I have first-hand knowledge of practices involved in hiring, renewing contracts, and reviewing teaching and research by faculty and graduate students. The standard operating procedures are clear and documented. Appropriate procedures to protect academic freedom are securely in place and routinely practiced. In addition, faculty and graduate students are awarded funding and recognized for excellence in research and teaching on the basis of professional competence and subject matter knowledge. All the hallmarks of a sound organizational system are present: explicit merit criteria and known rules are universally applied; productivity, experience, and skills (rather than connections) are grounds for advancement; peer review involves conscientious preparation and deliberation; credentials trump charisma every time. Social diversity is one of the pillars of excellence and justice in the university as well as in commerce and government.
"Variety" in methodologies and perspectives, however, is not always consistent with professional standards, particularly in natural and social science disciplines, which are based on the scientific method. I respectfully submit to the Select Committee that scholarship is not a variety show. Commitment to "variety" is not an appropriate measure of academic integrity or freedom of inquiry.

I conclude by quoting from the AAUP’s 2005 statement on academic freedom and civil liberties: “In the U.S., neither teachers nor students are responsible to the government for the content of their teaching or learning.” The independence of the academy is the foundation of research and teaching and therefore the excellence and global competitiveness of higher education in America. Please don’t undermine it. The mechanisms for ensuring academic integrity and freedom at the University of Pittsburgh adequately and responsibly address the 3 points raised in House Resolution no. 177. Additional government oversight is neither necessary nor desirable. A written copy of my remarks is available, and I welcome any questions the Select Committee would like to pose. Thank you.