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## Charles Koch's Assault on Academic Freedom

By [Andy Kroll \(/authors/andy-kroll\)](#) | Tue May. 10, 2011 6:57 AM PDT



John Murray

Billionaire Charles Koch, one half of the hugely influential Koch brothers duo and the CEO of Koch Industries, has splashed tens of millions of dollars to promote his freemarket, libertarian ideology. His charity has funded freemarket think tanks around the country, from the powerful Cato Institute in Washington, DC to state-level outfits pushing privatization and deregulation. Now, Koch is taking heat for a more controversial ploy: leveraging a donation to a major university in order to handpick college professors that agree

with his worldview.

Koch's charity, the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, pledged \$1.5 million to Florida State University to fund new hires in the economics department. But as the [St. Petersburg Times reported](#) (<http://www.tampabay.com/news/business/billionaires-role-in-hiring-decisions-at-florida-state-university-raises/1168680>), this was hardly a no-strings-attached gift. Koch representatives had considerable control over the hiring process (<http://www.tampabay.com/news/business/billionaires-role-in-hiring-decisions-at-florida-state-university-raises/1168680>):

Traditionally, university donors have little official input into choosing the person who fills a chair they've funded. The power of university faculty and officials to choose professors without outside interference is considered a hallmark of academic freedom.

Under the agreement with the Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation, however, faculty only retain the illusion of control. The contract specifies that an advisory committee appointed by Koch decides which candidates should be considered. The foundation can also withdraw its funding if it's not happy with the faculty's choice or if the hires don't meet "objectives" set by Koch during annual evaluations.

David W. Rasmussen, dean of the College of Social Sciences, defended the deal, initiated [motherjones.com/.../charles-koch-florid...](http://motherjones.com/.../charles-koch-florid...)

by an FSU graduate working for Koch. During the first round of hiring in 2009, Koch rejected nearly 60 percent of the faculty's suggestions but ultimately agreed on two candidates. Although the deal was signed in 2008 with little public controversy, the issue revived last week when two FSU professors—one retired, one active—criticized the contract in the *Tallahassee Democrat* as an affront to academic freedom.

Rasmussen said hiring the two new assistant professors allows him to offer eight additional courses a year. "I'm sure some faculty will say this is not exactly consistent with their view of academic freedom," he said. "But it seems to me it would have been irresponsible not to do it."

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**Randall E. Winn** (<http://www.facebook.com/rewinn>) 25 minutes ago (#comment-200873050)

(<http://disqus.com/facebook->

~~facebook~~) should have its academic accreditation pulled. If you let funders decide who teaches, then you're not really teaching: you're propagandizing. It's wrong when the Communists did it in Russia, it's wrong when the Kochs do it in the USA

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**filmacher** 25 minutes ago (#comment-200873065)

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Disgraceful. A rich entitlement asshole like Koch is so insecure about the ridiculous wealth the world produced for him, that he has to advocate for a philosophy that rewrites reality to cast him as John Galt, and anyone who punctures his illusion is an enemy.

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**Kathleen McNary Wood** (<http://twitter.com/killingMother>) 25 minutes ago (#comment-200873085)

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The new right wing assault on education is nothing short of a fight over teaching our children facts vs. fantasies. In Louisiana, it is now legal to teach the religious dogma of creationism. Unless we want to return to the Dark Ages, this is a battle we cannot lose.

[www.killingmother.blogspot.com](http://www.killingmother.blogspot.com) (<http://www.killingmother.blogspot.com>)

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As an aspiring academic who is about 30 credits away from getting my PhD, I ask, how is this new? Not that I agree with this process but corporations have been dictating tenure track appointees and research on university campuses for years.

The Koch's are just living proof that Madison's pluralism articulated in Ferdetalist #10 is really just a proxy for wealthy elites to stem the tides of the people.

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