



“A professor should be able to say whatever they want!”

ACTUALLY...

Academic freedom means that professors can research and write about whatever they like. But it doesn't mean a professor can say anything they like to their students.

EXPLANATION

A professor can write a scholarly essay critical of gender-neutral pronouns. If it's relevant to the course topic, the essay can be assigned as a course reading. But academic freedom doesn't mean a professor can knowingly address their students in ways these students have indicated are undesirable. Imagine a professor insisting on their right to address a student with a name that doesn't match the student's ethnic identity:

Professor: "Hi, John."

Student: "Actually, Professor, it's Juan."

Professor: "I can't pronounce Hispanic names. And besides, you don't look like a Juan."

If these were two equals encountering each other in public, Juan could just walk away. But in many cases students are required to remain in a course or supervisory relationship in order to graduate on time and obtain a good reference. The knowing misrecognition of a student's identity based on a professor's own personal views is not an expression of academic freedom. It is a form of disrespect that has no place in the classroom.