



# SAFS Newsletter

*Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

Maintaining freedom in teaching, research and scholarship  
Maintaining standards of excellence in academic decisions about students and faculty

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## IS THERE A FREE SPEECH PROBLEM?

*Christina Behme*

Section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms lists fundamental freedoms that apply to everyone in Canada. These fundamental freedoms can be held against actions of all levels of government and are enforceable by the courts. Freedom of Expression

### SUBMISSIONS TO THE SAFS NEWSLETTER

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is one of those fundamental freedoms. The importance of this fundamental freedom is undisputed. For example, Justice Peter Cory wrote that it "is difficult to imagine a guaranteed right more important to a democratic society" (*Edmonton Journal v Alberta (AG)*, 2 SCR 1326 at 1336.). In the United States, Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression are protected from government restrictions by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. One would assume that freedoms so important to a democratic society are upheld throughout North America, and especially at public universities.

Yet, recently, threats to freedom of speech have become a hotly debated topic on university campuses, on social media, and in the print media. Hardly a week passes without some new publication on this topic. Often (though not always) these publications are prompted by the shouting down of a usually (though not always) conservative speaker on a university campus and have catchy headlines like "[Progressives Shout Down Christina Hoff Sommers at Portland Law School](#)" (Saxton, 2018), "[Jordan Peterson vs. the new freedom fighters at Queen's University](#)" (Blatchford, 2018), "[Psychologist stares down left-wing 'Lock em in and burn it down!' Queen's U protest](#)" (Ernst, 2018), "[Faith Goldy's talk at Wilfrid Laurier was cancelled. And a damn good thing, too](#)" (Paradkar, 2018), "[Protesters disrupt lecture by uOttawa 'anti-feminist' at Ottawa Public Library](#)" (Crawford, 2018), and "[More 'free speech' fuzzies scrub Mac event](#)" (Mahoney, 2018).

The increasing frequency of similar headlines elicits two distinct reactions. One group claims that freedom of expression is under threat and that this threat is steadily increasing. Some (though not all) members of this group even speak of a Free Speech Crisis on

university campuses. I call this group Concerned about Free Speech (CFS). The other group claims that there is no (serious) threat to freedom of expression. Members of this group usually (though not always) insist that freedom is alive and well and has, in fact, been steadily extended during recent decades. According to this group, a “rightwing outrage machine” intentionally organizes “[events \[that are\] designed to provoke the on-campus left](#)” (Wilson, 2018). I call this group Unconcerned about Free Speech (UFS).

When two groups disagree about a matter as strongly as CFSs and UFSs do, we are usually in one of two situations. Either [1] at least one side intentionally misrepresents the position of the other side, or [2] at least one side misunderstands the position of the other side. Since one should not assume [1] without very good evidence, I will set it aside here and focus on [2] in this article. Being a member of CFS myself, I have been long perplexed by the insistence of UFSs that there is no threat to freedom of expression. A recent article, written by a proponent of UFS and celebrated by many UFSs on social media, made me realize that indeed we are speaking about different issues.

Under the attention-grabbing headline “Everything we think about the political correctness debate is wrong,” [Matthew Yglesias claims](#) that “Overall public support for free speech is rising over time, not falling ... [and that] a 2016 Knight Foundation survey showed that college students are less likely than the overall population to support restrictions on speech on campus” (Yglesias, 2018). Let’s evaluate the evidence for Yglesias’ claims. He cites questions subjects have been asked, for example: “... now consider a Muslim clergyman who preaches hatred of the United States. If such a person wanted to make a speech *in your community* preaching hatred of the United States, should he be allowed to speak, or not?” (emphasis added). The wording of this question (representative of others that comprise Yglesias’ evidence) makes it clear that people were asked whether a hypothetical speaker should be allowed to speak to *their* community. So, this research concerns the rights of people to decide whom they want to listen to. It may indeed be the case that in 2018 there is a greater willingness to tolerate some views, described in the abstract, than there was thirty or forty years ago. And this is a good thing.

A recent publication entitled “[The Skeptics are Wrong: Attitudes About Free Speech on Campus are Changing](#)” (Stevens & Haidt, 2018) challenges Yglesias’ methodology. I won’t repeat those challenges but, instead, show that even if one accepts Yglesias’ interpretation of the data his euphoric conclusion does not follow. First, freedom of expression is a (mostly) negative right and speakers are rarely if ever invited based exclusively on the abstract criteria Ygle-

sias focuses on. Rather, specific speakers are invited based on what they have to contribute. This has several important implications. First, Jordan Peterson's right to free speech creates no obligation on me (or anyone else) to listen to him. Only students who take a class from Dr. Peterson would accept such an obligation but this won't concern us here. Rather, the focus is on events, organized by various student groups on campuses, where attendance is not mandatory for anyone. As a member of one such group I might advise against inviting Dr. Peterson for many different reasons. For example, I could believe Dr. Peterson is a boring speaker. I could believe Dr. Peterson charges too much money for his time. I could have inquired and learned Dr. Peterson won't be available on any of the dates for which we want a speaker. These and many other potential reasons have nothing to do with the views Dr. Peterson holds. Perhaps our group even disagrees vehemently with Dr. Peterson's views and does not invite him for that reason. But, no matter what the reasons are, a failure of our group to issue an invitation to Dr. Peterson in no way interferes with his right to free speech. In fact the vast majority of Canadians never receive an invitation to speak on university campuses and no CFS is worried about this. What then are CFSs worried about?

There are two sets of worries. First are what I want to call "other-directed worries". Just as my hypothetical group decided that we do not want to invite Dr. Peterson, another group may decide that they *do* want to listen to Dr. Peterson. Likely they will then issue an invitation and, if he accepts, he has the right to speak to them and they have the right to listen. However, increasingly certain groups and individuals on campuses interfere with the decisions of *others*. Those groups and individuals want to police what *others* can listen to. Although this kind of interference *is* a violation of freedom of expression, it is not covered by the research Yglesias cites.

Perhaps anticipating this objection, those who advocate shutting down speakers they would never invite themselves have sometimes claimed that the university at large is the relevant group or community. And, they explicitly claim that views of which they strongly disapprove should not be expressed on university campuses: "A university would be the last place you'd expect to go to pollute your mind with reheated white supremacist schlock"(Paradkar, 2018). However, university communities are not homogenous groups. Students and faculty from diverse backgrounds and with diverse interests should not be expected to agree completely on many issues. In particular, they should not be expected to always agree on which speakers to invite to campus. Within-group diversity raises the second type of worry not addressed by the "general tendencies" view proposed by Yglesias.

In order to evaluate whether “support for free speech is rising” the relevant question to ask is not whether in general people have become more tolerant towards a hypothetical speaker described in the abstract. Rather, students and faculty should be asked “Have you or a group you belong to ever invited [to use Yglesias’ examples] ‘a communist, a homosexual, an opponent of all religion, a racist, [or a militant anarchist]’ to give a talk on campus?” Another relevant question would be: Have you ever attended a talk by a communist, a homosexual, an opponent of all religion, a racist, or a militant anarchist?” Would the majority of students and faculty answer ‘Yes’ to those questions? If not, one has to suspect that while support for free speech in the abstract might be rising, the willingness to expose oneself to those views is not.

Another important question is whether a subgroup that disapproves of a particular speaker should be permitted to enforce their views on the entire university population. For example, in the recent case of violent protests against Dr. Peterson at Queen’s University, it was a member of the university community, Queen’s law professor Bruce Pardy, who issued an invitation to Dr. Peterson. Another member of the university community, Queen’s Principal [Daniel Woolf](#), had explicitly supported Dr. Peterson’s right to speak at the event (Woolf, 2018), and several hundred members of the community expressed their wishes to listen to Dr. Peterson by attending the event. Thus, the protestors can hardly claim to be speaking on behalf of the university community. It is their willingness to use all means necessary (including physical violence and threats of serious harm) to prevent someone from exercising their right to freedom of expression and others from exercising their right to peaceful assembly that worries CFSs.

Threats to freedom of expression that are caused by the diversity of opinion on campuses are never addressed by Yglesias. The research he cites shows a generally positive trend towards inviting speakers with “controversial views”. But, there is no unanimous acceptance for any group. In general, roughly 90% of subjects would be willing to invite a “homosexual speaker” and 60% would be willing to invite a “racist speaker”. These numbers also show that between 10% and 40% of subjects would *not* be willing to invite speakers with those views. Yglesias cites no research about the attitudes of those minorities. In the case that a speaker they disapprove of is invited would they (1) not attend the event, (2) peacefully protest against the event (using flyers or newsletters for example), or (3) attempt to shut down the event? Further, is there any research showing whether the tendency to do (3) is increasing or decreasing? Those are the kinds of data CFSs are interested in.

Freedom of expression is a negative right that does not create an obligation to listen. Hence, anyone can respond to an announcement that Dr. Peterson will speak at their university with argument A1: “I am not interested in/bored by/offended by what Peterson has to say; therefore, I will not listen to him”. CFSs have no objection to A1. However, things change if one responds to the announcement with A2: “I am not interested in/bored by/offended by what Peterson has to say; therefore, I will prevent everyone else from listening to him.” A2 interferes with Peterson’s right to free expression as well as with the rights of those who are interested in what he has to say. A2 is the argument of violence-ready protesters who want to police what the wider community can listen to. CFSs strongly object to A2.

Some UFSs have acknowledged that there are attempts to stifle freedom of expression on campus but call those who consider this to be a problem “alarmists”. For example under the headline “There Is No Free Speech Crisis says Dr. Jeffrey Sachs”, the author writes: “According to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), there were 29 attempts in 2017 to disinvite or block an invited speaker from speaking on campus. ... The numbers were higher in 2016 (43 attempts were made), but the average over the last five years is just 31. Out of a country with 4,700 schools” (Sachs, 2018). It may come as a surprise that I agree with Sachs: the highly publicized attempts at disinviting or blocking people from speaking on campus are not *the* problem.

However, unlike Sachs, I believe those highly publicized events are indicative of a problem that runs much deeper. Like the tiny tips of massive submerged icebergs they signal the steadily increasing threats to Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Speech that more and more students experience on campus. Just how widespread the real problem has become was made clear in a mostly ignored article entitled “[My experience at the Jordan Peterson protest](#)”. In it, a gender-queer student who was at the protest describes what happened when they wanted to address fellow protestors: “Walking up to the girl with the megaphone, I asked if I could use it for a moment. She told me, ‘I do not know you so I do not trust what you have to say. You cannot speak’” (Daisy, 2018). One has to wonder why the girl was so afraid of what someone she never met had to say that she refused giving them a voice. Given how “naturally” her reaction came, one also has to wonder how many students are silenced on a daily basis by those who claim to speak on their behalf. Luckily, Daisy eventually got a chance to express their view. But their experience is merely another iceberg tip—many students never get to express their views openly and/or self-censor. And, as Daisy’s article and the comments to it show: there are many misunderstandings on both sides of this particular debate. Shutting down debate or other-

wise silencing inconvenient voices will do nothing to clear up those misunderstandings. Queens' president reminds us "that attempts to shut down debate and limit speech serve no one well—even the groups calling for such silencing. They merely make it easier for the next group in power to silence others" (Woolf, 2018). This sums up nicely what CFSs are concerned about.

Given that I focussed here on fundamental disagreements between CFS and UFC, perhaps it is best to end on a point of agreement. I believe Dr. Sachs is absolutely right when he asserts that "it is exceedingly difficult to gauge public support for free speech" (Sachs, 2018). I hope he will keep this in mind the next time he is tempted to assert with such confidence that there is no Free Speech Crisis and that those who disagree are hysterical alarmists. Furthermore, given that US president Donald Trump recently dismissed threats to campus free speech as "[highly overblown](#)" (Wegman, 2018), perhaps those on the political left may want to rethink their attempts at trivializing the problem.

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## RESPONSE TO WIDDOWSON

*Walter Bruno*

I read with some alarm Frances Widdowson's article "[‘ISLAMOPHOBIA’ AND MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY: Disrespectful Criticism of Islam Will Not be Tolerated](#)" (SAFS Newsletter, Jan. 2018). In it, Prof. Widdowson accredits graffiti such as "Fuck Islam" and "Islam is Cancer" as protected speech on campus, words to which she is, furthermore, not unsympathetic. She then interprets a phrase she has seen, "Love Muslims, Hate Islam," as something that "clearly distinguishes" between believers and their terrible religion. Adding to my galloping revulsion was Widdowson's uneditorialized quote about being at "war with Islam," a war she does not disavow in her article.

Prof. Widdowson is, of course, welcome to her opinion; however, I ask that she consider my objection to it, which is this: Critical thinking is about skeptical analysis, not pushing out "Fuck This," "That idea is Cancer," and "I love you and hate your religion." Hating a religion is actually not atheism or even dialectical materialism; it's

blind religious bigotry. Bigotry is not a strand of enquiry; within the humanistic university it's an epistemological defect, and religious bigotry is one of the phenomena which a public institution rejects, as contrary to core values.

By the way, Prof. Widdowson should dig deeper into the phrase "I love you and hate your religion." It's not necessarily a nice gesture, as she suggests; to me, it's redolent of the agonistic stance of one particular and powerful religion, missionary Christianity. That's called recruitment, not open-heartedness, although not all missionaries are closed-hearted.

It is particularly alarming that this article was published on the eve of the anniversary of the attack on the Quebec mosque, first ever in North America, with its slaughter of six worshipers and the maiming of many others. Regrettably, that event was not noted in the SAFS Newsletter. Yet I can't imagine the alleged shooter, Alexandre Bissonette, not feeling he was a part of the "war on Islam" nor harboring much of this "protected" bigotry.

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### **WHEN IT COMES TO FREE EXPRESSION, ANY LIMITATION IS A CRISIS**

*Robert Grant Price*

Doug Saunders wrote in *The Globe and Mail* that any talk about a crisis of free speech on campuses is overblown.

To make his case, he cites several studies that, taken together, present universities as places of open-minded, enlightened moderation.

"To mistake a colourful anecdote for a measurable trend is a basic scholarly error," he reminds us.

It's true that colourful anecdotes do not make a trend. But neither can a soothing column like Saunders' soothe growing concerns that universities are abandoning their roles as guardians of open inquiry.

In a healthy intellectual environment, scholars give free expression paramount importance. We cannot understand reality in all its dimensions without free-ranging language, and neither can new generations of students mature out of superstition and prejudice without



engaging others in difficult conversation. For these reasons, scholars understand that any attempt to limit expression is, by definition, a crisis.

If we give free expression the primacy it deserves, then a cool assessment of recent activity on university campuses indicates that universities do indeed face a crisis of confidence in inquiry, learning, and freedom of expression.

On 28 March, for example, a McMaster University student group cancelled a panel discussion titled “Tolerating Intolerance: A Discussion on Free Speech.” The panelists included Mark Mercer, president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, and Rick Mehta, an associate professor at Acadia University who is accused of being a racist transphobe.

The student anti-poverty group hosting the event shut it down before it happened, citing “that it would be difficult to convene the civil, balanced discourse we were hoping to have on this important issue.” In other words, they worried that protestors might become violent.

If only this was but one colourful anecdote.

Over the last year, protestors have worked hard to limit expression on Canadian campuses. To name a few: A group of students at Dalhousie University tried to have a student politician named Masuma Khan disciplined for public statements she made about “white fragility”; student unions at Ryerson University and University of Toronto outlawed students from organizing anti-abortion and men’s health groups; protestors de-platformed speakers at McMaster University, Laurier University, and other campuses; and last month, a protestor brought a garrote to talk at Queen’s University given by U of T psychology professor and YouTube star Jordan Peterson.

Rather than let intelligent people judge for themselves whether an idea is malevolent or benign, hateful or blasé, protesters elevate

### **BEQUEST TO SAFS**

Please consider remembering the Society in your will. Even small bequests can help us greatly in carrying on SAFS’s work. In most cases, a bequest does not require rewriting your entire will, but can be done simply by adding a codicil.

Thank you,

Mark Mercer, SAFS president

themselves to arbiters of taste and decide for others what they may or may not see. And rather than challenge speech they deem offensive, censorious “activists” prefer to eliminate the speech. This ought to trouble open-minded democrats. History teaches what happens if the speech can’t be eliminated—you eliminate the speaker.

With a garrotte, perhaps.

More disturbing is how universities contribute to the polarization of our political sphere. Ryerson University, for example, revealed its selective politics last year when it cancelled a panel on free speech out of fear that offended protesters might become violent. Yet the school will host a conference in May on white privilege, a racially-charged topic that many people—not just Caucasians—find offensive.

Ryerson is right to stage conference, of course. Offense is no reason to limit conversation.

Contrary to Saunders’ survey of the literature, a growing body of research indicates a shrinking respect for the free and open exchange of ideas.

A recent Gallup survey of U.S. college students, for example, revealed a growing discomfort with free speech. In the words of [Sean Stevens](#) and [Jonathan Haidt](#), “American college students today are, on average, more willing than students of recent generations to restrict speech and speakers on campus, in pursuit of other moral and political goals, particularly inclusion.”

And none of these colourful anecdotes speak to the ways university professors—many of them in part-time, precarious employment—censor their speech, thought, and scholarship out of fear of having the mob come down on them.

This is where the real crisis lurks and why we need to call any silencing of speech inside the university a crisis.

Most students are moderate, sensible people. It’s the hostile loud mouths—the people who can’t win an argument—and capitulating university administrators who we should all worry about.

Universities exist to pursue knowledge, not justice. (That’s the court’s domain.) In pursuing knowledge, universities must safeguard the freedom to scrutinize any idea and any speech. If free individuals—including undergraduates—cannot scrutinize an idea, then they cannot know for themselves what is true and what is false.

And that isn’t freedom.

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## **WHEN VICTIMHOOD CULTURE IMPEDES ACADEMIC FREEDOM FOR STUDENTS**

*Lindsay Shepherd*

“I think it’s important for universities to be safe spaces; where they protect faculty and students, and particularly students of colours and minorities.”

My friend and I – attending a Saturday night public lecture at Wilfrid Laurier University entitled “Mobility Justice and Urban Equity” – exchanged a knowing glance upon hearing this statement. The guest speaker, a professor from Drexel University, was following a trajectory I had come to expect from humanities professors: give an indigenous land acknowledgment and make a brief remark about how important land acknowledgments are; discuss an issue related to diversity, inclusivity, equity, access, and embodiment; and end with some sort of comment about how universities must be safe spaces that protect marginalized communities.

I cannot pinpoint exactly when the creed that “universities must be safe spaces” became the motto and philosophy of arts faculties in universities across the country – it seems to have crept in gradually. If I think back to my first semester of university, in 2012, I can’t recall hearing the term “safe space.” Now, in 2018, during the second semester of my master’s degree, the view that universities must protect and shield students from certain people and perspectives is held by most of the professors I know in my department. This view is troubling, as universities cannot claim to be pursuing the objective discovery of truth if some topics are simply off limits. Moreover, one of the worst things about university-style speech control is that it often yields predictable, boring conversations and shuts down interesting ones. Students must be able to freely bounce their thoughts off their classmates, so they can develop a repertoire of ideas. Otherwise, their opportunity for self-development is squandered and they remain intellectually stagnant. When we aren’t regularly exposed to viewpoints we disagree with, we may even find it difficult to put our disagreement into words. This results in poor argumentative abilities and the resort to name-calling, as well as reliance on terms such as “Nazi,” “Islamophobe,” and “transphobe.” Certain things are described as “problematic,” because that term signals that something bothers someone, but they can’t coherently explain why. In light of a campus climate that fosters victimhood culture, it is a worthy

thing to ask ourselves: do students have academic freedom? If so, is safe space culture not impeding what should be an expectation of a mature and intellectual classroom and campus environment?

The Economist Intelligence Unit, in their report *Democracy Index 2017: Freedom of Speech Under Attack*, claim “Freedom of expression is under threat from those who claim the right not to be offended,” further explaining that “The idea that some speech harms the listener has led to the creation of ‘safe spaces’ on university campuses in the US and the UK [and Canada] into which students who do not wish to be exposed to words and ideas they do not like can retreat.” Two trends work together simultaneously: not only should classrooms be safe spaces, but safe spaces should be available as alternative spaces in instances where students need to escape some sort of looming on-campus or off-campus presence. Wilfrid Laurier University, for example, was among the many universities where a student group organized a “Healing Space” on President Donald Trump’s inauguration day on January 20 2016, despite the fact we reside in a different country. At a speaking engagement in January at Mount Saint Vincent University, in Halifax, the Students’ Union offered a safe space for students during the time I would be present on campus. In late March, my student-oriented club – the Laurier Society for Open Inquiry – invited far-right personality Faith Goldy to speak on campus, and the Diversity and Equity Office offered a “drop-in space” (note the euphemism) for the time Goldy would be on campus. As a commentator on Twitter aptly advised, perhaps these fragile students should just take a nap during these scary speaking events, and by the time they wake up, it’ll all be over.

If we are to invoke the notion of academic freedom for students, we must consider how the student victimhood culture will extend its tentacles outside the classroom. Already, [Lenore Skenazy and Jonathan Haidt](#) trace victimhood culture back to childhood: “By trying to keep children safe from all risks, obstacles, hurt feelings, and fears, our culture has taken away the opportunities they need to become successful adults. In treating them as fragile – emotionally, socially, and physically – society actually makes them so.” In March, the University of Ottawa Students for Free Speech club sponsored a talk by Professor Janice Fiamengo, who was to present on the topic of whether universities are genuinely pursuing the truth. The venue for this talk was the Ottawa Public Library – yet the talk was still shut down by a protestor who pulled the fire alarm. The no-platforming mentality is common among leftist radicals on campus – but now the no-platform philosophy is moving off campus. There will soon be nowhere to go for people who want to host or attend panels and talks on current controversial topics where a fire alarm can’t be pulled to abruptly end the event.

Though I do not care for fearmongering, my prediction is that the typical humanities classroom in the near future will be bland and unidimensional in its discussions, as students will be too hesitant to express a thought that may get them reported to on-campus diversity authorities. I fear, if the victimhood mentality is allowed to fester, that we are in for a cultural decline, where citizens are either unable or unwilling to engage with people ideologically different from them.

“This is NOT a safe space!” a transgender activist declared as she stormed out of the Q&A session I was doing at Mount Saint Vincent University in late January. No, it wasn’t, and that’s what made the discussion at that Q&A session robust, productive, and engaging.

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### **ON MINIMAL CONSTRAINTS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

*Marc Heller*

Much like the discussion of freedom of speech, the discussion of academic freedom is never about justifying complete unfettered freedom. Schooling in general implies constraints, for without constraints we wouldn’t know what counts as schooling. So, the discussion must be about how constrained students should be and about what principles we should use to determine which constraints are appropriate and which are inappropriate.

Issues concerning how much freedom students should have almost always come down to differences concerning the nature and purpose of the university. I would like, then, to begin by outlining my conception of what a university should be and end with some of the ramifications this has concerning academic freedom for both students and professors.

Firstly, I believe that the university should hold a unique place in our educational system. Primary, elementary, and secondary schools cover the basics of education, and community colleges serve to prepare their students for a variety of vocations. That leaves unanswered the question how to complete this project: how to create *educated* people. I believe that this is the unique position that a uni-

versity should occupy: to fulfil the project of successful education by fostering the development of *educated* persons.

What I am talking about here is what is typically referred to as the “liberal model” of university education. Now, when I say liberal I mean a form of education that liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, which (as Martha Nussbaum reminds us) stems from the Roman and Stoic notions of education in general. A university that aims to educate and not simply train its students must then foster an environment that is conducive to the sort of teaching and learning that liberates the mind of its students rather than constraining it. A programme that does the latter is not an institution of education but rather an institution of indoctrination. The purpose of a university should not be to prepare its graduates for some specific vocation, nor should it be to endow them with basic knowledge and life skills, for there are already schools that assume this role. One cannot educate in order to liberate minds by focusing narrowly on honing one set of skills or transmitting one narrowly defined body of knowledge, as these other schools tend to. This means that universities need to offer a range of courses that span the whole gamut of human knowledge, and it follows that if progress is to be made—if the stores of knowledge that scholars, students, and society at large draw from is to be enlarged—then scholars and students must be permitted to examine any view that comes along. The only way to avoid turning a university into an institution of vocational training, or worse, an institution of indoctrination, is for professors, students, and administrators to dedicate themselves to examining ideas to determine which are true. So, if I am right about the university occupying the unique role of successfully completing the formal education process by liberating the minds of its students (in short, by educating them), then it seems to follow that certain minimal constraints should be placed on both faculty and students alike in accordance with this mission.

Michael Oakeshott reminds us that the university is “a place where [students have] the opportunity of education in conversation with [their] teachers, [their] fellows, and [themselves], and where [they are] not encouraged to confuse education with training for a profession.” So, at the very least, university administrators, professors, and students need to foster an environment where professors are allowed the freedom to teach as their expertise dictates and for students to question views without fear of reprisal for questioning them. This entails wide latitude in allowing students to express their views, whatever they may be. However, there may be times where expressing their views no longer becomes conducive to teaching well; a time when the discussion strays too far away from the subject at hand or becomes too personal. Professors need to be empow-

ered to shut down such discussions or re-center them. The freedom to be free of reprisal from administrators for holding certain views comes with it the responsibility to ensure that such expression does not prevent the rest of the class from participating in the discussion or from learning at all. For lack of a better way to put it, reason and truth become the censors of the university classroom.

What this means at the classroom level is that students should be able to freely disagree with their professors without fear of reprisal from those professors or administrators but they must yield to the professor's expertise when it comes to deciding the curriculum. Surely, there will be some cases where students do have an impact on the curriculum, but if reason and truth are our guides, then it follows that curriculum changes brought on by students will provide a better educational experience for all; they won't be changes brought on by ideology or emotion. Emotions, discomfort, ideology should not dictate a professor's choices in curriculum any more than they should dictate what students want their professors to cover or avoid.

Lately, though, students' demands upon their professors have been motivated by these latter reasons. This is problematic, again not because students have no right to criticize the views of their professors or their curricula, but because change in service to these reasons runs counter to the mission of the university: to foster the development of educated persons. Education is a process that must necessarily involve growth of some kind, for we would not want to call someone educated had they not changed for the better as a result of it. Where physical growth may entail pain, intellectual growth may entail anguish. In order to grow in the ways one must to become educated, one must challenge preconceived notions, ideologies, and established schools of thought. Nothing can be held so sacred that it should be avoided in a setting such as a university. So, even though I say that constraints must be placed on the freedom of students and professors to express what they will in class and in writings, I think it follows from what I have said above that such constraints must be minimal if the university is to retain its utility and its unique place in our educational system.

To be sure, I am saying that by challenging the views of their professors, their fellow students, and themselves, students may come to see that there is more to what they challenge than they previously thought. They may find that more evidence is required before they can mount a proper defense of their own view. This is the sort of environment that fosters intellectual growth. And if we systematically preclude certain views from being able to be expressed, we run the risk of violating those principles that are central to the liberal model of university education. If certain views cannot be expressed in class

or in scholarly works, it may follow that there are certain views that cannot or should not be researched, which implies that certain truths are to remain hidden and concealed from the light of reason. That is something that an institution of indoctrination takes as one of its central ends but not something any educational institution should abide.

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### **SIGNALS, NOT LEARNING: A review of Bryan Caplan's *The Case Against Education***

*John Palmer*

“We don't need no education”

—Pink Floyd, “Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2”

As an undergraduate, I always crammed for exams and rarely remembered anything I may have “learned” beyond the next week. I certainly did not remember much after a several months, not to mention after a year or two.

More than four decades of teaching at the university level convince me that my experiences are no different from those of most students. This observation is at the heart of Bryan Caplan's new book, *The Case Against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

The major point of Caplan's study is that high school diplomas and undergraduate degrees generally do not show that the students actually learned and retained much that will be useful after graduation (those who go on to teach are, to some extent, exceptions). Rather, completion of high school or the BA signals a student's ability, intelligence, work ethic, and willingness to perform to satisfy teachers' requirements.

Caplan reviews the evidence that even after taking account of ability, intelligence, and a host of other variables, students who complete high school on average earn more than those who don't, and those who complete a BA earn more than those who don't. Completion of a programme clearly is valuable to potential employers. The puzzle is: why do those students earn more even though they don't remember, much less use, most or any of what they studied?



Caplan's answer: The fact that they completed high school or received an undergraduate degree is worth so much because completion sends valuable signals, i.e. conveys valuable information about students' character traits and general abilities, despite telling very little about specific skills and learning.

I have been reading these ideas from Brian Caplan for nearly a decade, as he has posted them at the blog [Econlog](#). I was so persuaded by them that several years ago I gave a public lecture at The University of Regina "[I Didn't Learn a Thing as an Undergraduate.](#)" in which I summarized his ideas.

Caplan questions why we need so much education if the primary purpose of education is to certify and to generate signals, but not to foster learning. He points to all the language courses students are forced to take but forget quickly, to the required history courses despite which so many people know so little basic history, and even to the math and science courses that so many students take in high school only to signal their suitability for university. If the primary reason students take these courses is to signal character traits, not skills or knowledge, then it is wasteful. Surely students would be better off if they spent more time learning skills and less time signaling.

Let's face it: you don't need a BA for many, maybe even most, of the jobs that require one, but employers require BAs because students with a BA signal that they generally have more ability, better work ethics, and greater willingness to conform to the employers' work standards.

While that might be correct overall, it likely does not hold for any given individual. A reasonable student can rightly ask, "How can I send a reliable message to potential employers and universities about my abilities and personality if *not* by completing my education programme? Doing so is next to impossible."

As a result, the student quite sensibly decides to signal quality by getting more education. And so do millions of other students, all contributing to a signaling war with each one trying to send a signal that they are better-suited — i.e. better credentialed — than other job or college applicants.

Caplan's conclusion is clear: all this signaling is costly and wasteful. It is a negative sum game in that everyone devotes more and more scarce resources (time and money) to advancing themselves and/or their progeny in the credential war, trying to create more impressive signals.

High school students take courses that signal their willingness and

ability to submit to the rigours of college or university coursework. They also join extra-curricular activities to prove they are well-rounded; they participate in or even start their own charity fund-raisers to show they care about others; and they vie for “leadership” positions in local groups to show their leadership potential. Many sign up for SAT training courses or buy books with sample questions and guidance on how to improve their SAT scores. These are all attempts to signal. They have little to do with producing what economists call “human capital” — i.e. skills and useful knowledge.

In many ways, signals are good things. They aren’t perfect, but they are short-hand ways of conveying generally useful information. When someone completes high school, they signal they have the mental ability to grasp the basic material, and they also have the personal ability to withstand boredom and to jump through hoops, an important signal to potential employers. Further, if they get high enough grades and high enough SATs, they signal they probably have the mental ability and the personal characteristics to finish an undergraduate degree.

Similarly, completing a BA tells potential employers the student has even more ability intellectually, more stamina, and more willingness to conform.

Caplan suggests that from a societal perspective there *must* be a more efficient way to generate these signals. Having people spend, say, 16-17 years in school to create these signals is a very expensive way to do it.

Indeed, some of his critics have argued that if there were a more efficient way to acquire this information, employers and intermediaries would have developed mechanisms for doing so by now. Caplan’s first response to this is weak: he responds that the signals from education are so strongly embedded in our culture and psyches that we don’t trust alternative signals. If that is the only reason, I expect things will change, and fairly quickly over the next few decades.

However, his second response has more strength: we have had a credential explosion as students (encouraged by their parents and by educators) scramble to create better signals to make themselves more attractive than others to college admission officers and employers. Caplan argues that these signals are relative, in comparison with the applicant pools, and not absolute. If they were measured according to some absolute scale, then a high school diploma today would signal the same thing it did a generation ago (assuming high school standards haven’t changed much; however, see below). But when an employer is faced with a job applicant with stronger signals, like a BA, then the one with the BA tends to win.

According to Caplan, there are two big problems with this signaling war that is set off when we use schooling to signal character traits: War is a negative sum game, and the education signaling war induces grade inflation.

The signaling war is a negative sum game because it is to each student's advantage to get a high school diploma (or to complete a BA), but only because they are competing with other students who are also spending time and money on the race to acquire better credentials. Caplan argues that using schooling to signal abilities and character traits has no social benefits and hence generates far too much waste, with students taking courses they don't want and don't need, only to create acceptable signals.

I like Caplan's case that signaling is a major part of schooling and education. But there are some positive aspects to this signaling war that Caplan either ignores or dismisses too easily. The longer students are in school, the more they tend to learn and practice good work habits along with conformity to teachers' and professors' assignments. Caplan's response is that they can learn and demonstrate these same skills on the job if they go into the workforce; they don't need to spend so much unproductive time in school to learn and demonstrate these skills. My sense is that the two are not the same; it takes a long time and repeated exposure to learn how to tolerate boredom, to learn what types of conformity and non-conformity are acceptable and to whom, and to learn to set longer term goals and work toward them.

The credential war has another pernicious effect in addition to being negative sum: it induces grade inflation. High school teachers feel pressure to ease up just a bit so students can receive a diploma or so that those who might otherwise be borderline are admitted to college or university. Similarly university professors are under pressure from students to be lenient so the students can get into professional schools. And department chairs put pressure on professors to ease up so the students don't migrate to other departments to take easier courses to raise their grade point averages.

If students are increasingly studying less, as seems to be the case, and receiving higher grades, then the signals are being diluted. To that extent, students who want to impress employers and admissions officers need to generate additional and stronger signals. Many will choose to further their studies. Others will look for other signals. For example, students seeking admission to top business school programmes now are expected to do something to demonstrate their entrepreneurial drive and talents such as starting a business or organizing a fund-raising campaign. When I talk with these students, it is often the case that they don't really want to do these things, but

“it’ll look good on the application forms”; i.e. it’s part of the signaling war as they try to distinguish themselves from all the other applicants who have good, inflated grades.

Even if you are persuaded by Caplan’s arguments that schooling is mostly signaling and doesn’t really contribute much to the skills and talents of most students, you may be less persuaded by his recommendation for dealing with the high costs of signaling wars.

His solution is to eliminate taxpayer support of education. As a life-long educator who has enjoyed feeding at the trough of the public fisc, I cringe at this recommendation. I am especially reluctant to endorse it for grades K-12. At the university level, though, it makes sense to at least consider reducing the sizes of the government subsidies. I realize my experiences may not be generalizable, but they probably are: there are far too many students in university who will learn very little and use next to nothing of what they were taught. They are there, in part, because governments subsidize their participation in the credentialing wars.

Caplan’s book is an easy read. He writes with serious humour, if that makes sense. I have smiley faces in the margins all through the book. My major complaint is that the publisher chose to use endnotes instead footnotes, meaning I was constantly flipping back and forth to check the footnotes, many of which are well-worth the effort.

I certainly urge those who might be interested in Caplan’s views to read the introductory material in Chapter One. After that, Chapters Four and Five become tedious — necessary to bolster his case, but tedious, as he develops and carefully references his case numerically. Also his conversations near the end of the book are interesting. But for those who want the *Readers’ Digest* version of the book, I highly recommend [Caplan’s column in the Los Angeles Times](#), which presents his case extremely well.

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## **REVISITING RANCOURT V. St. LEWIS: Two Ways to Approach Truth Claims**

*Stuart Chambers*

Four years ago, former University of Ottawa physics professor De-

## SAFS Annual General Meeting

**Saturday 5 May 2018**

**9:00 AM - 3:00 PM**

Western University

Somerville House, Room 3317

9:00 - 10:00	Registration, coffee, and conversation
10:00 - 10:45	<b>Mark Mercer</b> , Professor of Philosophy, Saint Mary's University, and President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship  "Honest rudeness or insincere civility?"
10:50 - Noon	<b>Lindsay Shepherd</b> , Cultural Analysis and Social Theory, Wilfrid Laurier University, and <b>David Haskell</b> , Digital Media and Journalism, Wilfrid Laurier University Brantford  Lindsay and David will talk to us about Lindsay's experience last fall as a discussion group leader and the Laurier task force on freedom of expression on campus
Noon - 1:00	Buffet Lunch (Green Leaf Café)
1:00 - 2:30	Keynote Address  <b>Gad Saad</b> , John Molson School of Business, Concordia University, and host of The Saad Truth  "A Tsunami of Maladies Afflicting the Soul of Our Universities"
2:45 - 3:00	Business meeting (SAFS members only)

Registration Fees: \$30.00 per person, pay at the door. (Registration includes coffee and lunch, but not parking.)

To confirm attendance: please notify the SAFS president by 20 April. E-mail: [mark.mercer@smu.ca](mailto:mark.mercer@smu.ca), or write to SAFS, PO BOX 33056 Quinpool Centre, Halifax, NS Canada B3L 4T6.

Getting there: From the 401, take Wellington Road North to its end, then jog one block west to Richmond Street, go north to University gates (on your left), just north of Huron Street. On campus, follow this road over the bridge, turn left at the light and continue to traffic circle. Visitor parking is on your right next to Alumni Hall once you are almost around the circle. Rate: \$7.00 flat rate. From Highway 7, take Highway 4 south (it becomes Richmond Street). At the fork after Fanshawe, you can either stay left on Richmond to University gates (now on Richmond St.) as above, or stay right and go down Western Road, turn left at 3rd light (Lambton Drive). Visitor parking is on your right as you enter traffic circle. 3M Centre is across the traffic circle, 2nd building on Oxford Drive. [On Saturday there is usually no one at the Information booths, but check this site for a campus map.] Click on: [University Campus Map](#)

Accommodation: On-campus rooms at Western Bed & Breakfast are \$77.00 per night including continental breakfast. A modern, air-conditioned residence, located in Elgin Hall on University Drive, off Richmond St. North. ([www.StayAtWestern.ca](http://www.StayAtWestern.ca)). The Station Park on Pall Mall (1-800-561-4574), and Windermere Manor (1-519-858-1414), have UWO rates at ~ \$120.00 per night.

For information regarding getting there, parking, or accommodation, contact (before 27 April): Daniella Chirila, e-mail: [dchirila@uwo.ca](mailto:dchirila@uwo.ca), or by phone: 519-661-2111, ext. 84690.

nis Rancourt lost a [libel suit](#) to University of Ottawa law professor Joanne St. Lewis. The case took a strange turn of events following a student-produced report alleging systemic racism in the university's Academic Fraud process. Rancourt backed the report's conclusions; however, when professor St. Lewis, who is black, challenged the findings, Rancourt referred to her in a blog as then President Allan Rock's "house negro," a remark that initiated the libel suit.

To assess the validity of systemic racism, St. Lewis and Rancourt employed two very distinct approaches. St. Lewis chose to critique the student-produced report's methodology, whereas Rancourt chose to attack St. Lewis personally. The label "house negro" was purely diversionary. It side-stepped the fact that Rancourt could not prove the existence of systemic racism. The case is important because it highlights one of the primary functions of a university professor, that being, a duty to support truth claims with credible evidence.

### *Rancourt's Approach*

Rancourt based his position of systemic racism on a 2008 Student Appeal Centre (SAC) [report](#) concerning "unfair practices at the University of Ottawa" (p. 4). As the SAC report noted, "Out of the 48 students who consulted the Student Appeal Centre between November 1, 2007 and October 31, 2008 with cases of academic fraud, 71% were visible minorities. Arab, Black and Asian men and women – these are the students that most often get accused of academic fraud. This systemic racism at the University of Ottawa must stop" (p. 9). Ironically, not a single minority whose testimony was highlighted in the report claimed that racism played a factor. In fact, one of the witnesses even understood that "what she did was contrary to the policy on academic fraud" (p. 5) and that she had made "an honest mistake" (p. 6). Moreover, Student Appeals Centre Coordinator Mireille Gervais admitted that the SAC report was not scientific; rather, it was based in the centre's experience meeting with hundreds of individual students. [1] Despite these red flags, Rancourt remained convinced that systemic racism played a causal role in accusations of academic fraud against minorities.

However, Rancourt fell into the trap of *confirmation bias*. Convinced that systemic racism existed, he ignored other possibilities that could potentially undermine his claim. For instance, visible minorities may not have adjusted to the university's expectations. As the SAC report admitted, "We observe that many international students are unfamiliar with our overly strict system of academic fraud" (p. 9). As well, English or French may not be their first language, a reality that compromises their ability to understand complex instructions, especially those surrounding plagiarism.

Unable to establish a causal link between racism and accusations of academic fraud, Rancourt relied on ad hominem attacks to discredit Professor St. Lewis. In December, 2008, Rancourt's [blog](#), U of O Watch, "likened Professor St. Lewis' evaluation to academic fraud, and criticized the evaluation as unprofessional, intellectually dishonest and lacking in independence." This is ironic since then President Allan Rock made it clear in an e-mail (dated November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008) that the administration "imposed no limitations, constraints or conditions" on St. Lewis' report and that "she has been entirely free to say anything she wants" [2]. When Rancourt's claim of systemic racism failed to gain traction, he shifted the debate to St. Lewis' character, twice referring to her in his 2011 U of O [blog](#) as Allan Rock's "house negro."

### *St. Lewis's Approach*

Professor St. Lewis began by examining the evidence behind the claim of systemic racism. She refuted the SAC report's conclusions, noting how the entire analysis was based on "less than 1% of the total student population" [3] (p. 1). St. Lewis added, "it is the methodological failures and the lack of substantiation that make the [SAC] report most troubling" (p. 2).

Unlike Rancourt, Professor St. Lewis did suggest other possibilities that may have contributed to a student's misunderstanding of plagiarism guidelines. These included: the year of study of the student, previous academic experience, prior experience writing papers and personal life experience (p. 6).

Because the SAC report did not control for any of these variables, St. Lewis concluded that it did not establish the claim of systemic racism "in any reasonable or analytically plausible fashion" (p. 13). Although the SAC report indicated that minorities were accused of academic fraud, it could not adequately explain the "why" of that reality (p. 14).

That said, Professor St. Lewis could not categorically exclude racism, so one of her recommendations suggested that the university's administration "conduct an independent assessment to determine whether systemic racism plays any part in the Academic Fraud process" (p. 15).

### *Conclusion*

Instead of demonstrating precisely how accusations of academic fraud against minorities were racially motivated, Rancourt distorted the issue by relying on personal attacks against Professor St. Lewis. This tactic eventually resulted in a libel suit, which Rancourt lost. The case would have never reached the courts had Rancourt admit-

ted to oversights in his own analysis of the SAC report's data. His first mistake—jumping to conclusions—led to his second error in judgment: adopting ad hominem argumentative strategies.

The credibility of the SAC report's methodology was key to understanding whether systemic racism undermined the Academic Fraud process. Professor St. Lewis clearly demonstrated why the methodology was weak. In contrast, Rancourt ignored the report's flaws and accused St. Lewis of being Allen Rock's "house negro." Once sued by St. Lewis, Rancourt claimed victimhood status, declaring that his "free speech," not his lack of academic rigor, was the issue. The lesson here for professors is simple: truth claims must be substantive. Conjecture only clouds the issue.

1. Mireille Gervais, cited in Brendan Kennedy, "Student racism report flawed." *The Ottawa Citizen*, 26 November 2008, C.3.
2. Personal e-mail. Allan Rock, Subject: SAC Annual Report, November 12th, 2008.
3. Professor Joanne St. Lewis. "Evaluation Report of Student Appeal Centre 2008 Annual Report." University of Ottawa, November 15, 2008.

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### **FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MAKING THE CAMPUS A SAFE SPACE: Raising Questions about "Violent Speech", "Privilege" and "Transforming" the University**

*Frances Widdowson*

On February 9, 2018, the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship and the Faculty of Arts at Mount Royal University sponsored a public forum entitled "Freedom of Expression and Making the Campus a Safe Space: Where Should the Line be Drawn?" The purpose of the forum was to get beyond a common problem that exists in discussions about freedom of expression. This is that exchanges on the subject tend to fragment into rival echo chambers, with little attempt to understand the points of contention that exist. Even worse, freedom of expression is often opposed by those who identify as being "on the Left", resulting in support for freedom of expression being seen as a "right-wing" cause. This makes potential supporters of freedom of expression afraid to speak up; they do not want to be labelled as a person who is unsupportive of the political



struggles of oppressed groups.

As someone who is both sympathetic to socialist ideals and a supporter of freedom of expression (similar to George Orwell), this is a very perplexing state of affairs. To try to get a better understanding of the arguments involved, five people, all of whom would probably consider themselves to be on the Left of the political spectrum, were invited to put forward distinct points of view about the restrictions that should be placed on freedom of expression at universities. Dr. Kimberly Williams and Dr. Rinaldo Walcott were representatives of the Women's and Gender Studies perspective, while Dr. James Turk (Journalism) and I (Political Science) argued, as old school leftists, for unfettered freedom of expression. Dr. Sinclair MacRae, a philosopher, tried to map out the contested ethical terrain.

The entire event can be viewed on *The Calgary Journal's* [Facebook page](#). The question and answer segment is the most interesting because it shows a certain amount of interaction, providing an initial attempt at a clarification of views.

After watching the video several times and trying to understand the different perspectives, it appears that there were three significant points of contention. These concerned the definition of "violent speech", the intersection of "privilege" and freedom of expression, and why and how universities should be "transformed".

While supporters of freedom of expression often think that "violent speech" pertains to expression that incites violence against an individual or group, some of the panelists and people in the audience had a much broader definition. Although there was resistance to clarifying what was actually meant by "violent speech" (a representative from the Office of Campus Equity & Meaningful Inclusion, for example, responded to my attempt to get her to state what "violent speech" was with the assertion that she would not dignify this question with an answer), some information was forthcoming. There were comments that violent speech consisted of words that were perceived to dehumanize people or cause them psychological harm. A professor in the audience, D.A. Dirks, for example, argued that "[t]alking about trans women not being women leads to acts of violence against them". Similarly, speech that was perceived to be derogatory towards black people could be characterized as "violent" as it might lead to the "caging of black bodies", as had occurred when Africans were loaded onto slave ships. According to Rinaldo Walcott, speech itself can be seen as violent because "physical apprehension happens after ideas have been deployed".

One notion of "violent speech", which was not explicitly articulated, is the idea that some forms of expression constitute "epistemic

violence”. This idea was put forward by the Wilfrid Laurier University Rainbow Centre in response to a teaching assistant – Lindsay Shepherd – showing a clip of an exchange between Jordan Peterson and Nicholas Matte about the use of the transgender pronoun “they”. [According to the Rainbow Centre](#), the showing of this clip made the campus “unsafe” because “[t]hese debates, regardless of how ‘neutrally’ they are presented, constitute a form of epistemic violence that dehumanizes trans people by denying the validity of trans experience.”

Throughout the question and answer session there was substantial disagreement about similar epistemological matters. More specifically, the representatives of Women’s and Gender Studies seemed, at times, to assert that a trans person’s truth was different from that espoused by someone who identifies as cis-gender (when one’s biological sex and gender identity align). It was implied that the denial of the “truth” or “lived experience” of a member of an oppressed group could constitute a form of “violence”.

The second and third areas of contention – “privilege” and how the university should be “transformed” – were harder to decipher and link directly to arguments about freedom of expression. The panel member who talked about privilege the most was Dr. Kimberly Williams, who argued that her privilege made her question her decision to participate in the forum. Dr. Williams stated that she felt uneasy sitting on the panel because of being a cis-gender tenured professor, and thought that trans people who were less occupationally privileged should take her place. Dr. James Turk noted that he thought that “power” was a better word to use than privilege because freedom of expression was a right that should be exercised by all. This seems to indicate a disagreement between those who assert that the solution to power differentials is more speech, versus those who entertain the position that the expression of the “privileged” should be restricted to make room for the voices of the marginalized.

“Transforming” the university was an idea put forward extensively by Dr. Rinaldo Walcott. Walcott argued that the university was a “heteropatriarchal, white supremacist place”, and this required that fundamental changes should be made. According to Walcott, “for many of us the university is not a safe space and cannot be made a safe space unless it becomes a new university” because “multiple harms are enacted on minority communities...”. While it was never specified what these “multiple harms” were, one area of transformation that was mentioned was the development of “Trans Studies” programs. The representative from the Office of Diversity & Meaningful Inclusion also stated that the university was “objectively oppressive”. Again, it was not specified as to how this was the case,

except to state that “violent speech creates violent actions, repeatedly”. A “redistribution of wealth” within the university was proposed as a way to aid university transformation, raising the possibility that these demands were just a sophisticated form of rent-seeking.

Rent-seeking, in fact, often seems to be behind the attempts to oppose privilege (by creating barriers to entry for white cisgender straight males). It is argued that university resources should be diverted so as to institutionalize opportunities for subaltern voices to speak. By funding Trans Studies departments and Women’s Centres, for example, which can only be staffed by people espousing a particular identity, activists claim that the university will be able to combat the violence that is allegedly perpetrated by ideas believed to deny the humanity of oppressed groups. The pursuit of social justice also requires, we are told, that harmful ideas be prevented from spreading, like a virus, into the environment outside the university.

This view of transformation was very different from the one espoused by freedom of expression advocates. James Turk, for example, noted that the university could not be a safe space since it reflected what existed in society, and therefore we would expect that racist attitudes, because they exist in society, would also be present in a university. The university cannot be transformed in isolation from the wider society, it is reasoned, and the free exchange of ideas is necessary to determine how a more just future can be brought about democratically.

As is apparent from the above, there are significant areas of disagreement that exist about what universities should be like. The panel was a significant step forward because it enabled these divergent perspectives to be aired in one venue, and for a certain amount of mutual understanding to take place. With the exception of the one testy exchange that I had with the representative of the Office of Campus Equity & Meaningful Inclusion, the interaction was remarkably composed. Faculty, students and the general public were exposed to a clash of ideas based on very different political and philosophical assumptions.

That being said, important questions remain. First, is it possible for speech, in itself, to be “violent”? When the feminist Germaine Greer, for example, said “just because you lop off your penis...it doesn’t make you a woman”, was this equivalent to her slapping the face of, or inciting violence against, a trans-gender person? As the harm that will be caused by this comment is unclear, and will depend upon the subjective and unpredictable responses of those who hear it, how is it possible to restrict this kind of speech on campuses in any predetermined or systematic way?

Even more difficult are attempts to claim that questioning a group's perception of itself constitutes "epistemic violence". This is a major point of contention in universities today, and revolves around the epistemological question of whether or not knowledge is universal. According to Dr. Walcott, "we have to get beyond the idea that knowledge is neutral", legitimizing the suppression of true ideas that are believed to cause harm. Disagreement about this came to the forefront in the exchanges that Rinaldo Walcott and I had about the violent reaction that the academic Charles Murray had faced at Middlebury College in the United States. I remarked that Murray's presence on campus led some to claim that he was creating an "unsafe" space for black people, and taking this seriously would make it impossible for people to discuss Murray's ideas academically. While not claiming to know if Murray's arguments were valid (i.e. supported by evidence), my argument was that his views should not be censored because it prevented us from determining whether or not they were true. In fact, I noted that I was facing similar problems in questioning if indigenous spiritual beliefs were a "way of knowing", as indigenous activists had claimed that this constituted "violence" and "oppression" by denying indigenous peoples' ability to define themselves as a people. This, I pointed out, was a ridiculous argument; to say that an indigenous person's spiritual beliefs did not constitute knowledge was not the same thing as loading black people onto slave ships.

I am still not sure what Walcott's response was to the student demands for censoring Murray. He largely evaded the issue by stating that the opposition to Murray was never about trying to prevent people from stating what was true. Instead, the concern was that universities were creating "huge platforms" for "totally discredited knowledge" that "impinge[s] upon...minority personhoods", and this indicated a "deeply warped moral universe inside the university". But what if Walcott's assertions about this work were inaccurate? His contention that accepting Murray's claims would mean conceding that he, as a "negro", was "really dumb" indicated that he was misinformed (Murray's work was about population aggregates, not individuals). The reaction to Sam Harris' interview with Murray on [Harris' Waking Up podcast](#) also shows that these ideas have not been "totally discredited." And if these questions are far from settled, as I was claiming, what are the implications of censoring them on the grounds that they make the university "unsafe" for black students?

Second, is "privilege" a useful concept in trying to develop a more robust conception of freedom of expression, and if so, how should it be addressed in universities? At one point in the question and answer session I noted that I have problems with the concept because it appears to be saying that my position in the university is illegit-

imate. I wondered why we used to talk about discrimination and trying to remove barriers and now we focus on “privilege”. Is this focus tantamount to saying “shut up” to those who are perceived to have more “privilege” than others? Walcott, in responding to this comment, argued that the notion of privilege had always existed, but that it had “returned” because of the inability of the university to be transformed.

This brings us to the third set of questions: Should the university be “transformed”, and what impact will this have on freedom of expression? James Turk’s conception of “transformation”, for example, seemed to be about making the institution more democratic, and this is consistent with a robust conception of freedom of expression. Rinaldo Walcott, on the other hand, implied that it was appropriate to stop people from speaking on campuses if they were putting forward “discredited knowledge” that was “violent” – i.e. perceived to deny the humanity of oppressed groups. This, in my view, will result to increasing censorship, divisiveness, and authoritarianism on campuses, but I could be wrong. I am anxious to discuss these matters further to determine if my rendition of these diverse perspectives is accurate.

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## **IS THERE ROOM FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CLASSROOM?**

*James L. Turk*

Academic freedom is widely recognized as the foundation of the university’s mission to educate students and advance knowledge. But there are serious questions about the condition of that foundation in today’s university environment, with universities’ unprecedented and growing reliance on contingent faculty, their obsession with their “brands”, their embrace of students as customers, and their reward system that privileges serving private interests.

According to official statements, there would seem to be no problem. Virtually everyone in higher education claims to be a champion of academic freedom. Universities Canada (the association of university presidents) **proclaims**: “Academic freedom is fundamental

to the mandate of universities to pursue truth, educate students and disseminate knowledge and understanding.”

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (representing virtually all university and college academic staff) *states*: “Post-secondary educational institutions serve the common good of society through searching for, and disseminating, knowledge and understanding and through fostering independent thinking and expression in academic staff and students. Robust democracies require no less. These ends cannot be achieved without academic freedom.”

Individual universities have comparable statements of policy.

Yet, ironically, within the academy and outside, it is not even clear that there is widespread understanding of what academic freedom is. Too often, it is confused with freedom of expression, as when there is reference to “student academic freedom” or when discussions of freedom of expression treat academic freedom as synonymous.

The difference is straightforward. Freedom of expression is a general right of all Canadians that the *Charter of Rights and Freedom* identifies as a “fundamental freedom.” Freedom of expression is the right to express one’s opinions or views in public without censorship, restraint, or legal penalty. Academic freedom, on the other hand, is a special right – a professional right of academic staff that is necessary for them to do their jobs of educating students and advancing knowledge.

Academic freedom is both more expansive than freedom of expression and more restrictive. It is more restrictive in that there are things an academic can say on a street corner that they cannot say in the classroom as academic freedom is limited by disciplinary norms and collegially-determined curriculum, guidelines and policies. Academic freedom is more expansive in that it gives academic staff more latitude in dealing with their employer than virtually any other category of employee.

Academic freedom in North America has four dimensions. The first is in relation to teaching: academic freedom ensures that academic staff are free to rely on their best professional judgment in educating students, without being beholden to prescribed doctrine.

In relation to research and scholarship, academic freedom ensures that academics can pursue their research and scholarly activities without regard for conventional wisdom, others’ preferences, or the views of governments, special interests, the university administration or board, or even colleagues. It includes the freedom to disseminate the results of one’s scholarly work and recognizes that academic scholarly work includes the freedom to acquire, preserve,

and provide access to documentary material in all formats; the freedom to produce and perform creative works; and the freedom to participate in professional and academic associations.

The third dimension is intramural academic freedom – the freedom to express one’s views about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works. Without this dimension, collegial governance would be rendered meaningless. And, without it, academics, like virtually all other employees, would have a “duty of loyalty” to the employer that would fundamentally undermine the university as a place for education and the advancement of knowledge.

The fourth dimension is extramural academic freedom, ensuring that the university administration or board cannot sanction academic staff when they exercise their civil and human rights outside the university, however much university authorities, donors, special interests or the public dislike their actions or are convinced it tarnishes the university’s “brand.”

Such extensive protections and rights have made academic freedom controversial, often highly contested, with the result that, like all freedoms, it is never secure, but always under threat.

Traditional threats have come from governments, wealthy donors, special interest groups, boards of governors, alumni, senior administrators, colleagues and students. In response, academic staff in Canada have almost universally negotiated protection for academic freedom into their collective agreements – making academic freedom an enforceable right through grievance-arbitration. For the most part, collective agreement protections have proven effective in sustaining academic freedom rights against these traditional sources of threat.

But, there are new sources of threat that are endangering academic freedom in the contemporary university. The most pervasive is the growing reliance on contingent academic staff – academic staff hired off the tenure track in part-time, per-course, or even full-time contract positions with no path to tenure or tenure-like job security provisions. Tenure has been an underpinning of academic freedom because tenured academic staff can only be fired through a rigorous procedure and for just cause – which cannot include any of the rights protected by collective agreement provisions on academic freedom. While most academic staff in contingent positions also have collective agreement protections for academic freedom, these are largely meaningless unless the administration cites the content of their teaching, their scholarship, their intramural or extramural utterances as reasons for ending their employment. This they rarely

do – circumventing academic freedom rights and ending employment of contingent academic staff by simply not renewing their contracts – making it difficult for the contingent academic staff and their academic staff association to prove it was for academic freedom reasons.

This is a particular problem now because the percentage of academic staff in contingent positions has been skyrocketing over the past forty years. In the United States, [only 29 percent of university and college academic staff are tenured or tenure-track, with 71 percent in contingent positions](#). We have no equivalently reliable data in Canada as Statistics Canada discontinued its part-time faculty survey in the 1990s and its full-time faculty survey in the latter years of the Harper Government. Fortunately, after a five-year hiatus, Statistics Canada has reintroduced its full-time faculty survey. There is substantial anecdotal indication that a significant portion of academic staff at Canadian universities are in contingent positions. The latest is [a report from the Council of Ontario Universities](#), based on data from a majority of Ontario universities, showing that 58 percent of academic staff were in contingent positions.

Another more recent and serious threat to academic freedom is the widespread adoption by Canadian universities of respectful workplace policies – policies aimed at enforcing civility and respect. Based on existing anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, they conflate aspirations for respectful discourse with legal requirements for harassment-free, discrimination-free, violence-free workplaces. Typically, these policies lump together rightly proscribed harassment, discrimination and violence with ill-defined and ubiquitous disrespectful and uncivil behaviour – all leading to lengthy and difficult investigations and possible discipline.

For example, Ryerson University’s [“Workplace Civility and Respect Policy,”](#) like most others, starts with an aspirational statement that links disrespect and incivility with harassment while affirming academic freedom: “Ryerson University is committed to creating a culture of respect and civility that is free of harassment, where all members of the community share a commitment to academic freedom, open inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge... This policy applies to incidents and complaints relating to uncivil behaviour and, workplace harassment that may impact faculty and staff.”

As is common in such policies, it reiterates a commitment to academic freedom: “Nothing in this policy shall be construed to impinge upon the academic freedom provisions specified in University collective agreements or policies.”

And then takes it away: “*However*, faculty, instructors and others,



who have academic freedom rights, have a *responsibility to exercise these rights in a civil and respectful manner*” [emphasis added].

It then defines “incivility”: “Incivility deals with a broad range of behaviours including, but not limited to, unprofessional behaviour; rudeness; shouting or swearing; intimidation or bullying; threatening comments or behaviours/actions; unsolicited and unwelcome conduct, comment (oral or written including email communication), gestures, actions or contact that cause offense, humiliation, or physical or emotional harm to any individual.”

Should there be ambiguity about the extremely broad range of expression and behaviour that is proscribed under the policy, the University spells it out further in the accompanying “[Guide to Civility](#).” “At a basic level, incivility can be in the form of: rude comments; insensitive actions; unintentional slights; complaining; gossip; rumors; crude jokes; profanity. As issues escalate, incivility can become more verbally aggressive and can include yelling, belittling comments, intimidation and discriminatory comments. At its most extreme, incivility can take the form of violence or threats of violence.”

As a result of this policy, and others like it, the limits on academic freedom are stretched from rightful ones – violence, discrimination and harassment – to rudeness, complaining, gossip, unintentional slights, and expressions of anger. The problems are several and obvious.

First, the demand for civility fails to recognize that the means of expression can be a vital aspect of its content. As Justice Miller wrote recently in a decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal rejecting the position that everyone is free to say what they want provided they use temperate language: “Tone of voice, volume, facial expressions, and body language all convey meaning that cannot necessarily be conveyed effectively in words. The exercise of free expression is diminished by restrictions on the means that make it effective... To take a familiar example from US First Amendment case law, the meaning conveyed by shouting “fuck the draft” does not translate, without significant loss of meaning, to the quiet declaration, ‘I am implacably opposed to the draft’: *Cohen v. California* (1971), 403 U.S. 15.” ([Bracken v. Niagara Parks Police](#), 2018 ONCA 261)

In the classroom and in scholarly discussions, disallowing the conveyance of meaning by tone of voice, passion, anger, satire, aesthetic mockery, hyperbole, outrage is clearly a violation of academic freedom rights of academic staff and free expression rights of students.

Further, what is experienced as uncivil or disrespectful is irreme-

diably subjective. As John Stuart Mill noted in decrying as risky and hypocritical the notion that society should allow “the free expression of all opinions on condition that the manner be temperate and does not pass the bounds of fair discussion”: “Much might be said about the impossibility of fixing where these supposed bounds are to be placed: for if the test be offense to those whose opinion is attacked, I think experience testified that this offense is given whenever the attack is telling and powerful, and that every opponent who pushes them hard, and whom they find it difficult to answer, appears to them...an intemperate opponent” (J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*. London: Crofts Classics, 1947 (1859), 53. Quoted in Walter P. Metzger, “Professional and Legal Limits to Academic Freedom”, *Journal of College and University Law* 20(1), 1993, pp. 3-4.).

Perhaps most seriously, much of what respectful workplace policies define as uncivil or disrespectful is so common it can never be fairly or consistently enforced. As Jamie Cameron has pointed out: “When and in what circumstances another person might take offense at things said in a certain way is unpredictable and highly situational. Civility policies necessarily lend themselves to selective enforcement: though most will not, some offenders will be singled out for institutional attention: by definition and in practice, even-handed application of the standard is impossible. Short of a pattern of behaviour that satisfies definitions of harassment and bullying, mere rudeness and a lack of courtesy is just too pervasive and constant to be sensibly regulated” (“Giving and Taking Offense: Civility, Respect, and Academic Freedom. In James L. Turk (ed.) *Academic Freedom in Conflict*. Toronto: Lorimer, 2014, p. 293.).

### *Conclusion*

Academic freedom is the necessary foundation for a university to be able to fulfill its missions of educating students and advancing knowledge. If it is to survive, there are number of things that must be done – starting with ensuring that collective agreements have strong academic freedom language as that is the only way of providing enforceable protection. It is important to ensure that academic staff associations vigorously enforce that language. It is also vital to ensure that academic staff associations make it a priority to obtain job security protections for non-tenured, non-tenure-track colleagues (CAUT, *Fairness for Contract Academic Staff*). Academic staff should also challenge policies that treat disrespect and incivility equivalently to harassment, discrimination and violence. Finally, as the legendary Frank Underhill reminded colleagues nearly 60 years ago, “The best way to defend academic freedom is to exercise it.”

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## **TEACHER EDUCATION MUST RISE ABOVE POLITICAL CORRECTNESS**

*Rodney A. Clifton and Alexandra Bennett*

Increasingly, Canadian universities seem to be more concerned about political correctness than about educating students.

A [prominent illustration](#) of this is University of Toronto psychologist Jordon Peterson's public battle with university administrators, professors and some students over his refusal to use an expanding list of gender-neutral pronouns when referring to students with varying sexual orientations.

A less well known but arguably much more serious example is the increasing tendency for Canadian faculties of education to use admissions criteria that are unrelated to the characteristics and skills needed by effective classroom teachers. At the [University of Windsor](#), for example, special admission consideration is being given to candidates who reflect "the ethno-cultural and social diversity of Ontario's schools".

And, last September, the [Faculty of Education](#) at the University of Manitoba went even further by aiming to admit 45 per cent of incoming teacher candidates on the basis of their self-identification as members of marginalised groups, such as indigenous, non-white, disabled, LGBTQ and socially disadvantaged.

These admission policies are being implemented so that teachers increasingly represent the ever-changing social demographics of provinces. There is some merit to that aspiration, but there are several serious problems. One is that such self-identities are difficult to verify, and, consequently, are potentially easy to "game". A second is that such policies are not useful for identifying and admitting teacher candidates who actually have the potential to become effective teachers – which is the most important reason for having faculties of education at universities.

Parents, students, and even school administrators already know that there are substantial differences between the most and least effective teachers. A number of [excellent studies](#) have [shown](#) that the top 25 per cent are able to effectively teach 18 months' worth of curriculum content in a year, while the bottom 25 per cent are only able to teach about six months' worth. In short, the best teachers are

three times more effective than the worst teachers. Addressing this unacceptable disparity should be the most important priority among Canadian faculties of education.

In addition, the literature identifies three characteristics of effective teachers: high language ability; a good education in subjects taught; and a grasp of a variety of reliable assessment instruments and techniques.

Hence, it would make much more sense for universities to assess would-be teachers on the basis of their verbal and mathematical ability. In Canada, teacher candidates generally enter the professional programme after they have completed an undergraduate degree. Consequently, faculties of education should ensure that candidates are among the strongest in the university courses related to the subjects they expect to teach.

Unfortunately, Canadian universities and ministries of education do not currently treat the education and certification of teachers as seriously as they treat the education and certification of dentists, lawyers, and medical doctors – or even the certification of meat cutters and hair dressers – all of whom are assessed on the basis of competence alone. Following completion of their programmes of study, aspiring teachers are certified in varying ways across provinces. But they should be required to pass rigorous exams, covering both knowledge and actual teaching proficiency, such as the theory and techniques of test construction. The empirical literature shows that teachers spend about 15 to 20 per cent of their time formally and informally assessing students, yet they don't always know the best ways to do this.

Both universities and ministries of education have fiduciary responsibilities to prepare and certify the excellent teachers that all Canadian parents and students deserve. Fortunately, excellent admission and certification exams already exist. The Praxis exams, developed by the Educational Testing Service, could be used for selecting candidates and certifying teachers across English-Speaking Canada, if not the entire nation.

All it needs is for universities and provincial ministers of education to stop being distracted by identity politics and put into practice such simple reforms – which will benefit all Canadians, regardless of their background.

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## **WHY QUEEN'S MUST PROTECT FREE SPEECH ON CAMPUS**

*Nick Pateras*

There is a startling shift in culture underway across many North American campuses. Where a university used to be a marketplace of ideas, a forum to learn by way of boundless inquiry and exposure to contrasting opinions, many are now fast devolving to resemble a factory-line production instructing students on *what* to think, rather than *how* to think. This implicit step-change extends well beyond the walls of the lecture hall, however, to include the climate engendered by the broader university community, not least its own students. For this reason, it is imperative that the student body and all other stakeholders concerned with the delivery of a robust education commit to trading exclusively in the most valuable currency of learning: that of free speech.

As a recent Queen's alumnus, one who keeps a close eye on campus events in both Canada and the U.S. for the foreshadowing of any prominent social or political issues, I have become quite discouraged with the state of free speech at many institutions of higher education. Two instances of the confused climate are the outcry at U of T over professor Jordan Peterson's refusal to use gender-neutral pronouns and the recent UC Berkeley protests against controversial speaker Milo Yiannopoulos. The attempts to have Peterson fired and Yiannopoulos banned exemplify problematic themes. Not only

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is it bemusing that many students appear to hold the opinion that they already know all that they need to – stamping a question mark over their pursuit of a degree – but their willingness to riot denotes a grave irresponsibility. The line that offering someone like Yiannopoulos a platform to talk normalizes his brand of provocative politics is dramatically undermined when protestors throw punches and smash windows, *in potentia* normalizing violence as a response to opinions deemed objectionable. Though these demonstrators claim to act in the name of tolerance, permitting free expression is tolerance of a higher order, for limitations on speech are an ominous first step towards punishment of thought.

Though I share little common ground with both Yiannopoulos and Peterson on many issues, silencing them would be to deny myself the right to hear and learn from their arguments, or at the very least claim vindication for my own views. Conversely, those who seek to ban contentious speakers from campuses or ostracize peers for holding the “wrong opinion” must question why their own convictions warrant such protection if their reasoning is so universally evident. At any rate, these individuals betray the well-natured intention of the curious student who understands that learning necessarily involves exposure to conflicting perspectives and attempts to curtail speech are an impediment to this end.

My concern is that this misguided crusade of speech suppression could soon impose itself on the Queen’s community: the university is far from immune to this movement, as demonstrated by its recent checkered history on the subject. To its credit, Queen’s does identify free inquiry and free expression of ideas as essential values, and also hosts a statement on “Freedom to Read” online; however, in 2013 a free speech wall was removed by the school due to ostensibly “offensive content”, though no specific examples were cited. The year prior, the university dismissed professor Michael Mason for employing “politically incorrect” language despite an independent investigation finding that he “discharged his duties in keeping with professional standards”. These inconsistencies paint a puzzled story as to the school’s position on the issue of free expression.

It is for this reason that I am petitioning the Queen’s administration to endorse the widely acclaimed Chicago Principles, as outlined in a recent University of Chicago report on freedom of expression. These principles stipulate that a university’s overarching commitment is to vigorous, uninhibited debate, rejecting the notion that it should shield its members from ideas they find unwelcome or disagreeable. At the same time, the report incisively remarks that on-campus speech must still be held accountable to the law’s parameters, signifying that hate speech, harassment and incitements to violence would re-

main prohibited. Since its release, this carefully-worded manifesto has been publicly endorsed by many US schools such as Princeton and Columbia, so in following suit Queen's would become the first Canadian university to take this symbolic step. Amidst the backdrop of rampant calls for speech codes at many schools, this is a timely opportunity for Queen's to showcase its leadership on a contemporary issue of utmost importance.

Free speech is the fundamental underpinning of any society invested in progress because holding space for any and all ideas, even those considered offensive to some, is the most effective filtering system by which to separate valuable from invaluable, good from bad. As young adults engaged in our minds' cultivation, we should be seeking out opinions that differ from our own – the endorsement of the Chicago Principles will ensure that Queen's fosters the environment for us to fulfill this ambition.

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### **CENSURE OF PROFESSOR PETER RIDD OVER COMMENTS OF SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY A TROUBLING DEVELOPMENT**

*Matthew Lesh*

The attack on Professor Peter Ridd's academic freedom to discuss scientific integrity may very well mark the end of the Enlightenment at one of Australia's universities.

Ridd has been issued a "Final Censure" by James Cook University for expressing an opinion within his field of scientific expertise. He was also ordered to keep silent about concerns related to quality assurance in Great Barrier Reef policy science.

The censure was in response to comments by Ridd on Sky News in an interview with Alan Jones to promote an Institute of Public Affairs book, *Climate Change: The Facts 2017*.

In the interview, Ridd questioned the quality of science from "organisations like the Australian Institute of Marine Science, even things like the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies".

"The science is coming out not properly checked, tested or repli-

cated and this is a great shame because we really need to be able to trust our scientific institutions, and the fact is I do not think we can anymore,” Ridd said.

Ridd has worked at James Cook University, where he completed his PhD, since 1989.

He is a lecturer and researcher in physics and marine geophysics with more than 100 peer-reviewed articles to his name, and has undertaken extensive research on coral reefs.

“I just don’t think they’re very objective about the science they do, I think they’re emotionally attached to their subject and, you know, you can’t blame them — the reef is a beautiful thing,” Ridd said on Sky News.

James Cook University has claimed Ridd’s remarks denigrated the university. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is nothing more essential to a functioning university than scientific debate.

This is the very purpose of the university. James Cook University’s code of conduct explicitly states staff must “value academic freedom, and inquire, examine, criticise and challenge in the collegial and academic spirit of the search for knowledge, understanding and truth”.

James Cook’s actions have a serious chilling effect on scientific debate by discouraging academics and students from discussing controversial topics.

In a David and Goliath battle, Ridd has chosen to not lay down in the face of threats. Ridd has lodged Federal Court action to assert his academic freedom to discuss scientific integrity.

It is only through debate, claim and counterclaim that we can hope to find truth.

The fundamental role of the university is to encourage debate, not to stifle it with preposterous claims and disciplinary action.

This is the essence of the Socratic method, the process of argumentative dialogue between opposing perspectives, on which the Enlightenment and our universities are built.

The only way to discover the truth is to stimulate critical thinking through debate. This freedom also is explicitly protected in Ridd’s enterprise agreement, which guarantees his right “to participate in public debate and express opinions about issues” within his field of competence.



If our university professors are incapable of questioning and debating science we are bound to enter a new Dark Age. The restriction of scientific debate, the claim that certain hypotheses can no longer be tested and retested, marks the end of progress.

From the UK to North America to Australia, however, universities have become hotbeds of censorship and are lacking essential viewpoint diversity.

Last year a recording emerged of Canadian university tutor Lindsay Shepherd being aggressively reprimanded by senior academics for simply playing a debate in a communications class featuring psychology professor Jordan Peterson.

Meanwhile, protests against guest speakers, such as Charles Murray and Milo Yiannopoulos, on American college campuses have turned violent. The IPA's Free Speech on Campus Audit 2017 found that eight in 10 Australian universities have policies or have taken action that limit free intellectual inquiry.

In the past, QUT students were dragged through Federal Court for questioning the existence of a separate computer lab for indigenous students. Meanwhile, last September a protest turned violent against a "No to same-sex marriage" stall at the University of Sydney.

Australia's universities are public institutions, established under state and federal law, and receive most of their funding through government grants and state-subsidised loans. Their role is to serve the public interest through teaching and research, which can only be undertaken by encouraging dynamic debate about issues of public concern.

James Cook University is failing in this task by preventing the expression of an expert opinion. The university must withdraw all sanctions against Professor Peter Ridd.

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### **DOES ASKING CRITICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT ACCUSATIONS OF RACISM MAKE ONE A RACIST?**

*Philip Backman*

Not too long ago, a university wide e-mail appeared in my inbox, sent from our president at the University of New Brunswick (UNB),

Dr. Eddy Campbell. The communication was lacking in specifics, but it was clear that certain recent events had caused discomfort of sufficient magnitude that silence was not an option. Only later did I discover a cause for Dr. Campbell's brief missive: on the Fredericton campus, purported white supremacist posters had appeared, and the UNB Saint John student paper, *The Baron*, had published an article by a young man named Michael Thurlow.

I was curious yet ignorant, so I spent a few days researching these two events – reading what I could find and gathering additional information through correspondence with a professor and senior administrator on the Fredericton campus. Eventually I reached a point where I wanted to comment and ask additional questions, and so I composed a letter to a senior administrator and copied it to Dr. Campbell.

It is March 1<sup>st</sup> as I write this, and I have not yet received any acknowledgement of, or response to, my letter. I'm not sure what the silence means. Should I not expect a response? Was it read rhetorically? Did I insult with this letter?

I am wise enough to know that the subjects alluded to in Dr. Campbell's e-mail are explosive. One has only to look at how these and related topics have impacted the lives of people such as James Damore, Lindsay Shepherd, and Rick Mehta. With that knowledge I composed my letter carefully and precisely, I think. I offer that letter here for others to read. It provides additional detail on the events at UNB, but more importantly I'm soliciting feedback; is the letter flawed? By flawed I mean have I projected racism, bigotry, or intolerance; revealed a latent affinity for white supremacy? Please let me know, my contact information is below.

[Here is an article](#) that reproduces the posters said to have been found on campus.

6 February 2018

Hello George,

Again, thank you for digging around to answer my earlier questions.

I am asking a few questions because my attention has been drawn toward recent events occurring at other universities, such as Sir Wilfrid Laurier here in Canada, and Evergreen State College in the United States, that center around issues of free speech, discrimination and – it seems to me – topics that make some people uncomfortable. Because of this interest, I would like to explore the Thurlow/Baron incident a bit further.

First, I would like to acknowledge the UNB wide message that Eddy sent out on January 30<sup>th</sup>. I appreciated that Eddy took time to emphasize that agreement or disagreement be expressed and received ‘in a respectful manner whatever the issue.’ I agree completely and will uphold that standard in this letter.

I would like to begin by making a few observations. When I read the University wide announcement from January 30<sup>th</sup>, the absence of specific detail proved to be a challenge. As a UNB Saint John employee I thought the information provided was sparse – I wanted to know what the posters said and what had been printed in *The Baron*. Only by way of reference to *The Baron*, along with a subsequent google search, and a small application of intuition was I able to piece it all together and begin to use my own mind to evaluate events. I have a friend, another UNB Saint John employee, who admitted that, after following a path like mine, read and commented on the wrong *Baron* article. I encourage future UNB wide messages of this nature include additional detail or links so that those of us displaced from the immediate events can quickly ‘get up to speed’.

The specific information is important for all of us to have because it allows for fulfillment of one of the important messages contained in the UNB wide correspondence: ‘As a university, we value rigorous and thoughtful debate on a variety of ideas...’. With this I agree. And because I agree it is important to me that I not accept uncritically the judgements of others, even those of our President. Eddy makes it clear that he finds the posters contemptible and that *The Baron* made a mistake publishing the Thurlow article. His comments I respect and given his position in the university hierarchy I understand his motivation for not remaining silent. However, the message extends beyond his opinion alone: about the posters it is written, ‘They do not reflect UNB’s values or our commitment to diversity’.

As I am a member of the UNB community this statement purports to speak for me, and if it does, I need to ask what values have been challenged and how has the commitment to diversity been undermined? On this point I want to be clear. It may be true that I too will conclude that the posters and *Baron* article do not reflect my values or ideas on diversity, but I need to have the opportunity to make that conclusion myself.

Along this same trajectory, the rapid removal of the article from *The Baron* was an additional challenge to my own comprehension of the brewing controversy. I had time to read the article fully once, maybe twice, before it disappeared from *The Baron*, and I simply didn’t think to save a copy. Given that Thurlow’s article has been strongly criticized – Emma McPhee of the *Brunswikan*, in editorializing its content, used powerful language that included the words

racist, Nazi, and white-supremacist – I would have liked more time to study it. Words like McPhee used are used a lot these days, and I was curious if after my own review I would invoke similar language.

I believe it is correct that the Board of Directors for The Baron made the ultimate decision to remove the Thurlow article. And I suspect that most on the Board are young undergraduate students. I appreciate that they acted on their values, but their values are almost certainly different than mine. I am not completely the same person now, at 52, as I was as an undergraduate in my early twenties. These past thirty years have given me the time to read more, see more, and simply experience more. And because of that believe I am more thoughtful in many aspects of my life. So, with the Thurlow article I was curious and thoughtful; without passing any judgement – not immediately anyways – I wanted to THINK critically about everything he said. With that attitude I read through Thurlow’s writing not with a sense of disgust or outrage – as I believe many others did – but with a continual question running about my mind: “Is that statement true or false?” I wanted to proceed carefully so that I thought with my brain and did not judge from emotion alone.

It was that questioning that prompted me to send my original note to you and Eddy and to ask if one of Thurlow’s very first claims – that posters advertising UNB talks centered around ‘whiteness’ – had in fact existed. We now know that a talk did happen on the UNB Fredericton campus: “What does Whiteness do? Settler Colonialism, feminism and epistemic innocence,” and was presented by Dr. Erin Morton from the UNB History Department. I have since discovered a video of this talk on YouTube and have listened to a portion of it.

I did ask in my original email that if given a ‘whiteness’ talk did exist, was there any critical condemnation of Dr. Morton’s presentation. After viewing the video of the lecture, I still am inclined to ask that question, but only after considering what has happened to Thurlow.

I recall from Thurlow’s article that, in part, he discussed Indigenous people and made certain critical comments pertaining to them that was not complimentary. I’m not sure if his comments can be characterized as racist based on a formal definition – by this I mean I don’t recall that he made the claim that indigenous people are inferior (or superior) to any other race, and because of this advocates for their unfair treatment by another race. [Maybe he did make such a comment, but I don’t recall and do not have the article to reference]. I recognize that Thurlow has singled out an ethnic group, Indigenous people, but I feel any observations he has made about them, any claims to knowledge that are in doubt, should be challenged by argument grounded in the facts. This is not always easy to do, but

certainly attainable in principle in many situations. For example, I recall that the article included a quote from an individual which expressed his favorable experience as a student in the residential school system. Well, does this person exist? Is the quote attributed to him? Did he attend a residential school? In the same way, many other contentious points can also be explored. In this manner, through an honest pursuit toward truth, the credibility of Thurlow's article will either stand or fall. This is how I think Thurlow's article should have been discussed; I learn very little, and find myself suspicious, when reading an interpretation that is sparse in detail and specific criticism, yet liberal in the use of words like racism, Nazi, and white supremacy.

Morton, like Thurlow, is critically discussing an ethnic group, and is not complimentary in her observations or conclusions either. In Morton's case she is discussing white settlers and modern day white people. Morton is not being racist either, but like Thurlow her points should freely be challenged – and if they are – will stand or fall based on how well they survive scrutiny. I am curious then why, given the similarity between Thurlow's comments on indigenous people and those of Morton's about white people, why Morton's talk did not receive a commensurate level of criticism? Maybe it did, and I am unaware.

Sincerely,

Philip Backman

*Philip Backman ([pbackman@unb.ca](mailto:pbackman@unb.ca)) teaches physics at the University of New Brunswick Saint John.*

## **THE POLITICALLY CORRECT WANT TO FIRE RICK MEHTA**

*Kris Larsen*

A petition demanding the firing of Acadia University psychology professor Rick Mehta is yet another example of political correctness running amok on campus. Amongst other things, Professor Mehta ran afoul of the speech police by criticizing a psychology thesis (“coming to terms with ... sexual identity through interpretive dance”) and chiding Opposition Leader Andrew Sheer, who disrespected freedom of expression by expelling from caucus a senator who suggested that some First Nations children benefited from residential schools.

First, Professor Mehta, in [his interview with The Rebel's](#) Sheila

Gunn Reid, uses such terms as “confirmation bias” and “narcissism” to describe the thesis in question, but constructively suggests it might be improved if the author indicates how the ideas expressed might benefit others who share the author’s experiences.

Second, nobody credible denies that some students were abused in some residential schools. But it is unfair to perceive this through a group identity lens where individual schools and individual staff who are innocent are nevertheless tarnished with the same broad brush as offenders. Also, a claim that some benefited is highly plausible, given the number of schools and the thousands of children who attended them. Indeed, this claim is strengthened if we believe no less a luminary than writer and classical pianist Tomson Highway (certainly not one to deny that some abuse occurred in some schools!), who describes his time at a residential school as “[nine of the happiest years of my life.](#)” And Professor Mehta, in the Gunn Reid interview, alludes to students who reported “great experiences”. He also correctly points out that many of these schools rescued children from poverty. To this, it is worth noting that poverty on reserves is, in part, attributed to documented corruption (a la Chief Theresa Spence and Attawapiskat), which our chattering class Laurentian media and Liberal (also liberal) elites seemingly deem “in poor taste” to discuss.

Of course, aggrieved parties must always be free to explain why a thesis is of high intellectual standard and why residential schools were bad. They are also free to critique Professor Mehta’s comments. They may write articles for publication or submit letters to the editor, post YouTube videos, or whatever. But, alas, all of this requires work and it is so much easier to just demand that “offending” parties be fired and/or otherwise bullied, terrorized, humiliated, shunned, or impugned.

Methinks it is time to give totalitarian political correctness short shrift and restore freedom of speech to its rightful place in a free and democratic society. The politically correct must remain free to express opinions, but not silence those with disparate views.

*Kris Larsen ([larsenke57@gmail.com](mailto:larsenke57@gmail.com)) is a retired Nova Scotia civil servant with a background in adult education and social services. He and his wife live in Halifax, NS.*

## **ACADEMIC FREEDOM? HOW NASTY CAN A UNIVERSITY BE?**

*Denis Rancourt*

The present era of reactionary institutional responses to violations of political correctness is exposing the fact that “academic freedom”, of both professors and students, does not really mean much, except what it has always meant.

In the concluding paragraphs of her chapter on academic freedom in her 1986 book *No Ivory Tower*, Ellen W. Schrecker brilliantly states what modern academic freedom has always been and was always meant to be:

“The academic world of Schaper and Cattell, Ely and Nearing, was to change considerably over the next few decades. Especially in the years following the Second World War, the American system of higher education was to expand in size and to become a more democratic and less genteel place. Yet its treatment of political dissidents changed little. The same pattern of pressures and responses that set the early precedents determined the later cases as well. There were some differences to be sure, especially in procedural matters. There was more faculty participation, for example. This was largely the result of the academic profession’s success in establishing the principle of tenure. Though its possession did not invariably protect controversial professors from being fired, by the 1940s and 1950s it did usually ensure that they got some kind of a faculty hearing.

“Procedures apart, however, there were fewer differences than we might assume. Institutional loyalty was the overriding concern. In almost every situation, faculty members and administrators responded to outside pressures for the dismissal of dissenting faculty members in accord with what they believed would best protect or enhance their school’s reputation. The rhetoric of academic freedom obscures those concerns, as, in many instances, it was designed to. After all, even the famous academic freedom statement that the University of Wisconsin released after the Regents reinstated Richard T. Ely in 1894 was planned in part as a piece of institutional promotion – as, in the words of the man who suggested it, ‘an excellent advertisement for the institution.’ Stripped of its rhetoric, academic freedom thus turns out to be an essentially corporate protection. And, as we trace its development during the Cold War, we should not be surprised to find that it was invoked more often to defend the well-being of an institution than the political rights of an individual.” (The two last paragraphs of Chapter I: “An Excellent Advertisement for the Institution”: The Development of Academic Freedom, 1886-1918; in Ellen W. Schrecker’s *No Ivory Tower – McCarthyism and the Universities*, Oxford University Press, 1986.)

Nonetheless, it is interesting to ask: Just how far can a Western university, in a so-called free and democratic society, go in violating the freedom of expression and the professional independence of a

tenured professor?

My own case gives a graphic answer to this question.

First, here is the background of what was actually happening in the classroom. This letter from a parent of one of my students was published in Canada's largest national newspaper on February 9, 2009:

FREE TO LEARN by Julia Debono

Windsor, Ont. – In 2006, while shadowing my daughter, then a student at the University of Ottawa, I attended one of Denis Rancourt's classes (Professor Makes His Mark, But It Costs Him His Job - Feb. 6). Prof. Rancourt, clearly a dedicated, principled teacher, moderated a spirited, engaging, intellectually provocative discussion in which about 50 students eagerly participated.

Other undergraduate classes that I attended consisted of the professor lecturing while students chatted, surfed the Net or took verbatim notes. Few asked questions and there were no discussions, even when the professor asked for some.

Prof. Rancourt's class resembled classes I had at the University of Michigan's Residential College in the mid-1970s, right down to the use of narrative summaries instead of grades to evaluate learning.

His class was an example of the kind of educational experience I sent my daughter to university to be a part of." (Letter to the Editor, *Globe & Mail* (National Edition), February 9, 2009.)

There were hundreds of such letters to the university and to media, and a large petition. Here is my report of how my first-year (freshman) physics course had developed: "[How to Not Teach Physics.](#)"

In addition, I was publicly critical of the university administration on my "U of O Watch" blog and I practiced reform wherever I could legally do so, given the on-paper guarantees of my academic freedom and professional independence.

Twice the university disciplined me for allegedly not following the curriculum. Both times the university was rebuffed by binding arbitration decisions and the discipline was removed. I established that in Ontario a university professor is allowed to be political in the classroom, in addition to covering the curriculum, even in a science course. This irked the reactionary administration to no end.

As a result, sometimes the political activism would spill over into students demanding their rights within the institution. There was an



upsurge of student activism in the years that I taught, which I mostly attribute to reactions against oppressive policies and an influx of politically savvy international students. But of course, the administration blamed me and scribbled network diagrams about it in their notes (I saw this in access-to-information records).

In one such “spill over”, the president – experienced trial lawyer, former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations and former Liberal prospective candidate for Prime Minister of Canada, Allan Rock – was publicly exposed intimidating a student complainant, in the president’s office. The student’s audio recording was played on regional cable TV, and a link of it was sent to all the university’s students by email. The president never did that again.

Within a few weeks after the cable TV show aired, my many research graduate students and I were locked out of our laboratory without notice and, as I learned in 2017, the university destroyed my large collections of valuable scientific samples, and immediately made the laboratory inoperable.

The violations of my academic and constitutional rights that also occurred prior to and after the lock out are difficult to grasp, but they did occur, and many “respectable” high officials were knowingly involved. Now I want the new president to fix this and the university to be accountable. This recent letter is how I presented the case to the new president:

January 8, 2018  
Jacques Frémont  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
University of Ottawa  
550 Cumberland, Room 212  
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5  
f: 613-562-5103  
e: president@uOttawa.ca  
By email and by fax

*Re: Ending the University of Ottawa’s unrelenting punishment of me*

Dear President Frémont,

I was a professor in the department of physics at the University of Ottawa from 1987 until 2009. I occupied the highest academic rank of Full Professor beginning in 1997.

I am recognized as an expert in my profession and have taught thousands of students. I am a much appreciated teacher and research supervisor and I have published over 100 articles in leading journals

in several areas of science ([my present h-index score is 35](#)).

I taught the Senate-approved course “Science in Society”, which I created following campus-wide student demand, in the largest auditorium on campus. It was informally known as the activism course.

I was a critic of the university and I defended students against what I saw as institutional discrimination and racism. In so doing, I used Malcolm X’s political term, “house negro”. I did this in the context of a struggle for justice and in good faith, as attested to by the attached letters to you from community activists: Hazel Gashoka, Jean-Marie Vianney, and Cynthia McKinney.

The university dismissed me in 2009 using the pretext of my having assigned high grades to all 23 students in one advanced physics course, and then spent over \$1 million sponsoring a large defamation lawsuit against me.

You have emptied out my bank account by court order, you have repeatedly threatened to take my family’s home, and you have asserted that you will continue to enforce recovery of your legal costs in excess of \$1 million. Therefore, I am not able to pursue my work as a teacher and scholar, since you would take every penny.

You destroyed my career and took everything I have. You have done enough. I’m hoping that your sense of decency will cause you to grant this request for relief.

The university’s punishment of me has been relentless, including the following.

#### *Destroyed scientific samples*

Recently this year, as I sought to continue my scientific work, the university said that it destroyed my large and unique collection of scientific samples — when it locked me and my students out of our laboratory while I was still a full professor.

Many of the samples are irreplaceable and priceless, and I considered myself their custodian on behalf the scientific community. The Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa (APUO) has assumed my \$1.25 million grievance concerning this destruction.

The destroyed scientific samples included:

- (a) The only large non-oxidized piece of the Santa Catharina meteorite, in which the meteoritic metallic phase “antitaenite” was discovered.
- (b) The only large sample of remnants of the K/T boundary me-

teorite that may have killed the dinosaurs, collected in the field by a leading-expert collaborator, and kept in a sealed atmosphere.

(c) Unique suites of synthetic layer silicate compounds, which led to several fundamental discoveries.

(d) Suites of loess-paleosol samples (ancient soils) from two sites, in China and Eastern Europe.

(e) Preserved samples of sediments from 100 lakes in Canada, from the largest study of its kind in the boreal forest.

(f) Several suites of samples of synthetic compounds and alloys having unique electronic, magnetic, and magneto-volume properties.

For years the university threatened to destroy my personal papers, too. Since 2008, the university refused to give me access to my belongings from my personal office in the physics building. The materials were research notes, original course content, unpublished book manuscripts, two decades of correspondence, specialized books, and much more. Only recently, thanks to your direct intervention, was I able to recover the more than 200 cubic feet of paper materials.

### *Student spy*

The university hired a student spy (Maureen Robinson) to covertly surveil me for more than one year while I was a professor. Her actions were condoned by her immediate supervisors (the dean and the legal counsel of the university) and included using a false cyber identity (“Nathalie Page”) and falsely representing herself personally to third parties. The student spy provided weekly reports about me to the university. Her role was described by an Ontario appellate-court judge in his motion ruling in the following terms:

#### MAUREEN ROBINSON

[15] The circumstances of Maureen Robinson’s involvement in this entire matter is troubling at best. Throughout the relevant portion of the Award by Arbitrator Foisy, Ms. Robinson’s written notes were referred to [as] “the report on Professor Rancourt’s address prepared by a University of Ottawa student”.

[16] Pursuant to the Udell Affidavit, and based on evidence from the hearing, the student being Maureen Robinson was the editor of the student newspaper who had been hired by the University in what the University described as in a clerical capacity to assist Professor Rancourt in his office, without his input on her hiring.

[17] Either in consultation with her employer, the University, or on her own, she monitored the activities of Professor Rancourt both on and off campus and reported her finding back to the University. In an email to Dean Lalonde, she admitted to having a “personal grudge” against Professor Rancourt and went so far as to liken her monitoring of Professor Rancourt as “posing as a young girl to catch a pedophile”. Ms. Robinson was not called as a witness at the hearing and, the parties agreed that her “report” would be considered as an “aide memoire” only.

[18] The University referred to the “report” thereafter as a transcript which such description was objected to by the APUO. Similarly, Arbitrator Foisy made certain findings which appear to be based solely on the report which was not evidence. [Underlined sub-title in original]

#### *Covert psychiatric report*

In 2008, the university’s VP-Governance coordinated a capture of my intimate childhood information for use by a hired psychiatrist to make a written “psychiatric opinion” of me without my consent or knowledge.

The university thereby violated my constitutional privacy rights, my personal dignity and integrity, and numerous ethical codes regarding expert medical diagnoses.

The university followed this by not informing me of its actions, and by vigorously opposing my access to the psychiatric report until the final hour of an appeal in litigation for access in 2017.

You have a reputation as an advocate of human rights, and you recently took charge of the university’s case with me.

I write to you now to ask for a fair resolution that will allow me to resume my work as an educator and scientist, and to earn my living in this way. As it stands, the university would seize all of my income, just as it recently seized my bank account. The interest alone that you seek is more than \$30,000.00 per year.

Please assure me that you will instruct the university lawyers that a settlement is needed that will allow me to resume my career.

Yours truly,

[original signed]

---

Professor Denis Rancourt

[address]

Encl.: [Letters from Hazel Gashoka, Jean-Marie Vianney, and Cynthia McKinney](#) [three attachments in the original]"

That is how nasty a university in a free and democratic society can be. I know other public institutions behave the same way but we rarely find out. I have been dedicated to uncovering as much as I can.

I have been guided by this quote:

“One knows ... that the university and in a general way, all teaching systems, which appear simply to disseminate knowledge, are made to maintain a certain social class in power; and to exclude the instruments of power of another social class. ... It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.”

– Foucault, debating Chomsky, 1971. (“[Human Nature: Justice versus Power](#)”)

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## CONFRONTING THE BORG

*David Solway*

Protests against free speech in the name of free speech have become the political flavor *du jour*.

Although the MSM tends to avoid covering these unseemly episodes, anyone with a computer and the interest to go with it can witness online these totalitarian irruptions at universities, colleges and libraries across the continent: Milo Yiannopoulos at Berkeley, Jordan Peterson at Queen’s University, Heather Mac Donald at Claremont-McKenna, Gavin McInnes at DePaul, Charles Murray at Middlebury, and so on *ad vomitatum*. But one gets a different perspective – obviously more immediate, more appalling – when one is present at these public displays of doctrinaire belligerence and repressive violence so dear to the Left. One cannot shake a sense of disbelief and moral shock, at least at first.

Just the other day and not for the first time, I experienced this feeling of helpless rage and moral incredulity when my wife, Janice Fiamengo, was invited by a newly formed undergraduate group, the University of Ottawa Students for Free Speech, to give a lecture titled “Is the University about the Pursuit of Truth or about Protecting Approved Ideologies” at the Ottawa Public Library. When we arrived, we found the doors blocked by a crowd of Antifa offshoots calling themselves, variously, the Revolutionary Student Movement and Ottawa against Fascism, pre-programmed automatons wearing masks, carrying placards and blaring slogans through bullhorns. One of these slogans was paradoxically apt: *No Platform for Hate. No Debate.*

A scuffle broke out. We were barred from entering by a phalanx of massed bodies. Janice was slandered as a fascist, a hater and a rape apologist. I got into a shoving match to defend my wife from potential harm. The paid security guards merely backed away. The police finally arrived and eventually cleared the entrances, but did so with kid gloves, patiently explaining to the assembled thugs that they had the right to demonstrate but not to prevent entry – an instance of “soft” or “selective” policing that is now the norm. When I pointed out to the officers that the protesters were in violation of the law – Bill C-309 which makes it a criminal offense to wear masks in public and the Trespass to Property Act which likewise establishes penalties in the Criminal Code for obstructing access to public venues – and that immediate arrest of the lawbreakers was in order, I received a non-committal shrug in response. I should say that I do not blame most of these officers; they are acting under strict orders from higher up.

The saga was not yet over. As we were setting up in the designated auditorium and Janice was preparing her talk, the fire alarm was pulled and we were forced to evacuate the building, which put an end to the proceedings. The false alarm, of course, is a standard tactic of disruption and yet another convictable offense. We have experienced this so often that I’ve suggested we come equipped with ear plugs.

Another thing that strikes me about these protesting hordes – apart from their proclivity to break the law with customary impunity – is the monumental ignorance they exhibit. The few protesters I have actually managed to talk to over the years have never read the works of the people they are shutting down. Among an abbreviated list: They know absolutely nothing about Paul Nathanson or Cathy Young, whose public lectures they have disrupted. They have not read a word of David Horowitz, who speaks accompanied by bodyguards. They have not consulted Jordan Peterson’s *12 Rules for Life*

or attended his lectures on Jungian archetypes, Christian theology or English Common Law. They have no familiarity whatsoever with the magisterial oeuvre of Charles Murray. It goes on.

They do not even know their own origins, having never cracked the spine of *Das Kapital* or heard of Antonio Gramsci and “the long march through the institutions,” his colleague Georg Lukacs, or the Frankfurt School kingpins like Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Erich Fromm. They are ignorant even of Herbert Marcuse whose theories they are aggressively putting into practice. Like a contemporary, ideologically primed version of the *Star Trek* Borg, they march in lockstep, spout slogans and commit acts of violence, regarding themselves as heroes of the coming Utopia. (Obviously, they have never heard of Thomas More either.) We have seen this commitment to mindless violence in the service of a presumed higher good before in Hitler Youth and Sixties-inspired groups like the Red Brigades in Italy and Baader Meinhoff In Germany.

The current brigades are vastly more ignorant than the latter two groups, who at least knew their sources, but for a sect that doesn't know what it's doing but knows how to do it, they are remarkably adept. Masks and hoodies not only obscure identification but prevent personal contact. Placards are used as door-jammers and sometimes as weapons. Bullhorns prevent dialogue, in other words, *No Debate*. The term “fascist” endlessly repeated as a slur against speakers is both a misnomer and a misapplication – in other words, a *Platform for Hate* – since it is the protestors who are employing fascist methods of intimidation and closure.

Their ideology, formulated in Marcuse's seminal 1968 essay “Repressive Tolerance” – that is, freedom depends upon repressing others, particularly conservatives and free marketers – and in his widely circulated *One-Dimensional Man*, functions as the ground of their actions. Marcuse advocated in the latter for “new modes of realization,” by which he meant, *inter alia*, “freedom ... from earning a living,” a condition perfectly exemplified by the shiftless and materially idle population of militant students and welfare-supported political hoodlums who assault law-abiding citizens, monitor ideas, snuff out open discussion and pull fire alarms. Marcuse, a cynosure of the left, was himself an escapee from fascist Germany, but as Jonah Goldberg points out in *Liberal Fascism*, the same techniques of totalitarian repression are common to both Marxism and fascism.

All this is bad enough, but what is even more alarming is that the Borg enjoys the support, whether tacit or explicit, of university administrators, a politicized professoriate, a suborned media network and the police establishment whose officers, as I have mentioned, are instructed to tread lightly. Although in this case one protester

was arrested for mischief – a rarity – generally the police will nab those who fight back as if *they* were the instigators of public disturbances. Thus, the bureaucratic echelon that represents the law effectively breaks the law by refusing to enforce it. Authority is complicit with the violators. The phrase “law enforcement” becomes another misnomer.

And the irony is palpable. As Janice pointed out in a post-event interview and an *Ottawa Citizen* report, pro-life activists on campus peacefully holding signs and obstructing no one are immediately apprehended and face disciplinary proceedings, for example, at the University of Calgary and Carleton University, among others. It is no stretch to imagine that a group protesting an Islamic colloquy or a feminist conclave would be arrested on the spot and charged with creating a public nuisance. What we are observing is not only selective policing but the selective application of the law.

The hooligans who prevented my wife from delivering her talk numbered maybe two dozen, sufficient to sink an articulate analysis with a barrage of loudly chanted drivel and obloquy – perhaps less distressing than the occasion at the University of Toronto when she was hustled into a police cruiser for her protection. But whether in small or large deployments, the guerillas adopt the same tactics and are motivated by the same ideology. I still have trouble believing what I see, but as they say, seeing is believing. Naturally I need to be particularly sensitive and alert since I cannot allow harm to befall my wife. Jordan Peterson has called her “a tough cookie” but that is no guarantee against libel and physical threat.

In any event, sanctioned anarchy, especially when one experiences it intimately and on a more or less regular basis, serves as a vivid wake-up call. I could wish more people had the dubious opportunity to note first-hand what is happening to their culture. Possibly then something might be done about it. Regrettably, many I have spoken to have no idea of the current state of cultural disarray, the decline of civility, media corruption, academic decadence, authoritarian indifference to democratic principles and the rule of law, and the political subversion practiced by the revolutionary Left. They fail to realize that we are in a state of war and that truth, honor and decency are daily casualties. They have never contemplated Pastor Niemöller’s premonitory poem. They think the term “progressivism” means “progress.”

It is as if our cultural and political leaders, like the elite in Constantine Cavafy’s great poem, were eagerly awaiting the barbarians and were bitterly aggrieved when they didn’t show. There is no longer any reason for disappointment. Our mandarins have got their wish. Peterson wryly remarked, as swarms of Antifa clones were pound-



ing at the door and breaking windows during his brilliant presentation at Queen's, that "the barbarians are at the gate." In a way, this was not quite accurate. They are here milling among us, inhabiting the universities, marching in the streets, dismantling the civil order, engaged in the perversion of values, and, like Marcuse, promoting tyranny in the name of freedom. Their freedom.

The barbarians are not at the gate. The barbarians are inside the gate.

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## CATASTROPHIC ANTHROPOGENIC CENSORSHIP (Part I)

*Jack Edwards*

*Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd. –  
Voltaire*

It is not a question of whether actions by proponents of Catastrophic Anthropogenic Global Warming (CAGW) adversely affect the free exercise of discourse about climate change; that seems well-established. The question is whether those actions are having more than just a chilling effect on the free expression of sceptical opinion and contributing to a more general cumulative effect that could be catastrophic to free speech. What is meant by "catastrophic" in this context? Is it just hyperbole or are there trends that justify its use?

Indications of answers to those questions come from a variety of sources. Two are found in an article by Kevin Williamson [published in National Review](#): 1) In 2014, Professor Lawrence Torcello of the Rochester Institute of Technology called for the criminalization of "climate denial"; 2) Adam Weinstein, following on the heels of Torcello, [published an article](#) with the straightforward headline: "Arrest climate-change deniers." He advanced Torcello's argument but, unlike the latter, who was somewhat nuanced in his suggestions, Weinstein was unequivocal: "Those denialists should face jail. They should face fines. They should face lawsuits from the classes of people whose lives and livelihoods are most threatened by denialist tactics."

In Australia in 2013, Canada's David Suzuki, emeritus professor and environmental activist, stated that [climate sceptics should be](#)

[jailed](#). In 2016, in an article published in *Rolling Stone Australia*, Suzuki stated that the former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, should have been “thrown in jail for wilful blindness” to global warming. More recently, although stopping short of recommending a jail term, the specific accusation against Harper is repeated on [his website](#).

About the same time Suzuki was making his statements in Australia, Robert Brulle, a Drexel University professor, published a paper purporting to examine the financial status of the Climate Change Counter-Movement (CCCM) and denigrating it for its support of the [fossil-fuel industry](#). Two years later (2015), drawing on Brulle’s paper, the Democratic Senator for Rhode Island, Sheldon Whitehouse, drew a parallel between fossil-fuel companies and the tobacco industry, strongly implying a need to use the RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act to prosecute members of what he called “[the climate denial network](#).”

More recently, in 2016 in an [op-ed piece](#) in the *Providence Journal*, Michael Kraft, a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, clearly advocated the use of the RICO Act to prosecute climate sceptics, again, much as was done against the tobacco industry in a [2006 judgement](#). Advocating RICO use against the fossil-fuel industry, however, is not enough for Kraft. He wants to extend it to “think tanks and advocacy groups,” which, in the longer term, could find its way to campus organizations and universities that host speakers sceptical of the certainty of “consensus science.”

The probability of using RICO to prosecute climate sceptics seemed to reach a high point in March 2016 when then Attorney General Loretta Lynch admitted to meetings that discussed bringing charges against climate-change “deniers” for civil offenses, and then [forwarded the issue to the FBI for follow-up](#). At about the same time, proposed California Senate Bill (SB) 1161 (“California Climate Science Truth and Accountability Act of 2016”) would have made “misleading and inaccurate information disseminated by organizations and representatives backed by fossil fuel companies” and related “advertising and publicity” subject to prosecution under California’s unfair [competition law](#). By July, the official platform of the Democratic Party recommended the following: “Democrats also respectfully request the Department of Justice to investigate allegations of corporate fraud on the part of fossil fuel companies accused of misleading shareholders and the public on the [scientific reality of climate change](#).”

How do recommendations by (former) academics, governments and others to pursue legal means to censor scientific opinion relate to events on university campuses?

Few students imagine that they will be subject to threats and intimidations of the kind just described; however, over the last few decades they have acclimatized to various forms of censorship. What started as good intentions to protect the feelings of others, to be inclusive and to support diversity has led to many unsavoury outcomes. Questionable forms of control have emerged that serve neither students nor the broader culture to which they will soon belong, such things as speech codes, safe spaces, micro-aggressions and trigger warnings. Violations of those controls have been used on occasion to justify violent acts (the use of pepper spray; destruction of property; shoving; beatings, etc.) against both fellow students and invited speakers.

In such an environment, self-reliance and critical, independent thinking suffer. Students, except for thoroughly acclimatized supporters of politically correct controlling practices, are increasingly reluctant to express their opinions, fear reprisals from faculty and administration and act in ways to avoid open criticism and shaming by fellow students. How can free speech, the fundamental freedom of a democracy, survive and flourish in that context? The answer is that it cannot and current trends are not only indicative of its demise but catastrophic to its survival.

Findings from a recent Gallup–Knights Foundation [Survey on campus free speech](#) (reported in March, 2018) provide evidence of the decline. The results from over 3,000 students indicate: an increase in support for limits on speech (29%, up 8% from 2016); the campus climate prevents some students from expressing their views (61%, up 7% from 2016); political conservatives are less able than their liberal counterparts to share their opinions (69% vs. 92%); shouting down speakers (37%) and violence (10%) are sometimes acceptable.

The controlling practices in many universities in North America, however well intentioned, emerged, sheltered under the umbrella of diversity and inclusion. Results from this survey, compared to those of the previous year, suggest their implementation is correlated with a decline in student support for free speech, a situation analogous to the larger society?

Over the last several decades, an inversion has occurred of traditional values of the host population to an amorphous patchwork based on indictments of tradition that have fragmented the culture. In the U.S., instead of a melting pot, there is growing decomposition and disunity. In Canada the patchwork is held together by controls exercised by human rights tribunals, which prosecute citizens for “hate speech.” Despite an easing of those controls through repeal of Section 13 of the Human Rights Act, consideration is now underway to [try to revive it](#).

What became a radical push for diversity and inclusion has fostered a climate of political intimidation and censorship. Students, especially, are ripe for being shaped toward the acceptance of ever more extreme forms of control. Despite attempts to push back against these trends, even a cursory examination over this decades-long struggle reveals a slope that points in only one direction.

Part II will cite examples of legal actions taken to curtail free speech, further evidence of growing censorship on campus, and how each contributes to a future catastrophic to the survival of free speech.

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### **PANEL DISCUSSION CANCELLED AT McMASTER UNIVERSITY**

*Mark Mercer*

Freedom of expression on campus is a research interest of mine, so I was delighted to accept an invitation by a student group to come to McMaster University to participate in a panel discussion on the matter. At the discussion, I would have explained why liberal education requires that professors and students alike be free to follow whatever arguments they wish to wherever those arguments go.

Sadly, just as I was about to call a cab to take me to the Halifax airport, I received an email message informing me that the event, scheduled for Thursday 29 March, had been cancelled.

The discussion had been organized by Overcome the Gap (OTG), a student group at McMaster, the group that had brought Jordan Peterson to campus around this time last year. (Peterson was drowned out by disruptive protesters, and McMaster University president Patrick Deane originally indicated that the hoodlums were exercising their own free expression rights. Deane later changed his mind.)

There seem to be three different reasons why OTG decided to cancel it. None is flattering to the group. Each reason makes reference to another invited panelist, Rick Mehta.

Dr Mehta is the psychology professor at Acadia University, in Wolfville, NS, who has become the target of much vitriol lately for having expressed his views on the residential schools, the psychology of people who reject their birth gender, differences in taste or

temperament between the sexes, rape culture, and other topics.

The first reason is that OTG had heard from people who think Rick Mehta should not be given the privilege of a platform. These people threatened to disrupt the discussion. Security being unable to guarantee the safety of people or property, OTG cancelled the event.

The second reason is that with the withdrawal of the third panelist, McMaster history professor Jaeyoon Song, OTG worried that the panel had become one-sided in favour of freedom of expression on campus. For the sake of the group's reputation, OTG cancelled rather than sponsor an unbalanced event.

Dr Song withdrew from the panel about thirty-six hours before the discussion was to take place. Apparently, OTG had not told him earlier that Dr Mehta was to be on the panel. Dr Song withdrew in protest over comments Dr Mehta had made supporting the freedom of expression of an alleged racist.

The third reason is that OTG saw the justice of the no-platform argument and disinvited Dr Mehta all by themselves in the only way open to them, by calling the whole thing off.

Dr Mehta, by the way, was going to be in Hamilton not to discuss residential schools or rape culture, but freedom of expression on campus. His critics frequently claim that he is unqualified to pronounce on many of the other things he likes to talk about. I don't think he is, but either way, he's certainly qualified to speak about freedom of expression on campus, having shown himself in many venues to be a keen observer of events and opinions relevant to the topic.

So it wasn't that Dr Mehta needed to be denied a platform because he was about to talk pernicious nonsense regarding things outside his field. Rather, it was because, despite what he was in town to talk about, he had at other times in other venues talked nonsense (if he had).

Or, perhaps, taking a page from the book of the apartheid-era South African police, Dr Mehta needed to be denied a platform from which to advocate for freedom of expression on campus, for if his words were to move people to try to relax restrictions, soon enough we'd all be swimming in pernicious ideas about residential schools, etc. (In the apartheid era, not only were certain topics off limits, but so also was asking why those topics were off limits.)

At the event, I was going to outline what I find to be the three most popular current arguments in favour of administrative oversight and control of campus discussion and expression, and explain where I

think each goes wrong. I would then note that those who make these arguments would not be convinced by my criticisms.

I would finish by outlining the differences in the two views of the university behind the two positions on campus freedoms. Those who want a free campus value independence of thought and choosing for one's own reasons, while those who want oversight and control think instead of the university as preparing an elite to assume its place in the professions, business, society, and politics.

Dr Mehta, for his part, would have described his research on the value of view-point diversity in intellectual endeavours. Viewpoint diversity is the old idea that we learn to think for ourselves through experiencing conflict between different theories.

By cancelling the event, OTG did a great disservice to professors, students, and other members of the McMaster community, because the discussion would have been an opportunity for people to learn and, even, for the remaining panelists to discover their mistakes.

Cancelling it for the first reason, fear of disruption, has dealt a severe blow to the integrity of McMaster as an institution of education. Would-be disruptive protesters have now been encouraged to issue more threats and to engage in more thuggish behaviour. Their tactic succeeded again, just as it had a year ago at Dr Peterson's talk. And this time they didn't even have to get out their noisemakers.

The second reason also does no credit to OTG. If no third panelist could be found at short notice, a two-person panel would have been perfectly fine. Dr Mehta and I proposed to discuss objections to freedom of expression on campus and, anyway, we were ready to respond to questions and criticism during the long discussion period.

While cancelling the event might have salvaged OTG's reputation in the eyes of some McMaster people, it certainly harmed it in the eyes of many others. Among the former are the thuggish no-platformers, among the latter are those who value inquiry and discussion.

The third reason for cancelling is that the organizers themselves support the idea of no-platforming people with whom they disagree (and about matters that aren't at hand). The extent to which this reason was effective in the decision, to that extent the barbarians are no longer merely at the gates but are within the city itself, in charge of its clubs and societies, busily destroying intellectual life.

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