



## Despite Claims to the Contrary, Free Speech at Universities Is in Crisis

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In America's culture war, one of the most important battles currently being waged is taking place on its college campuses. America's universities — places that should be a bastion of free thought and expression — are increasingly becoming “no-go” zones for conservative speech and thought. But to hear some in the media, free speech on campus is not an issue at all. In fact, certain pundits claim the free speech crisis is a myth.

Over at Vox, Matthew Yglesias writes that “support for free speech is rising,” particularly among liberal college students. Among his sources for this claim is highly questionable polling done by the General Social Survey (GSS), which claims that support for the free speech rights of five proposed types of speakers — a communist, a homosexual, an atheist, a racist and a person who favors a military coup to overthrow the government — has actually grown over the past 45-plus years.

But the GSS survey has serious limitations. For one thing, it is not at all representative of college students since it polls all adults aged 18-34. Further, the study does not include students who live in “group quarters” otherwise known as dorms. Also, the study does not take into account the issues of the times and how they have changed over the years.

For example, in 1970, communism was a much larger geopolitical issue than it is today; and acceptance of homosexuals is much more common now than it was then. Of course, support for the free speech rights for such groups has grown over the years.

Another of these pundits is Jeffery Adam Sachs. In Sachs' *Washington Post* article on March 16, entitled The "Campus Free Speech Crisis" is a Myth. Here are the Facts, he cites several polls showing that the majority of young people support the First Amendment in theory. One such poll, a recent Gallup Knight Foundation Survey, claims that 70 percent of students want their campus to be an “open learning environment,” a point that Sachs points to in defense of the atmosphere on college campuses. But the real takeaway from that poll is that nearly 30 percent of college students don't believe that their campus should be an open learning environment.

Nobody believes that the anti-free speech contingent on our campuses is a majority. They are, in fact, an extremely loud minority. Unfortunately, this obnoxious element has gained the ear of the administration on many university campuses.

A recent case in point took place at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. Christina Hoff Sommers, an author and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute who speaks out against so-called third wave feminism and intersectionality, was attempting to give a speech on the subject when she was accosted by a group of overprivileged and under-brained activists who disrupted the event. The protesters rushed the stage and whenever Ms. Hoff Sommers attempted to speak, they shouted the same canned mantra.

Their refrain was childish. “Mic check. We choose to protest male supremacy, not give it a platform. Christina Sommers has repeatedly delegitimized the suffering of women worldwide. We believe, our siblings and our comrades, women are not liars with victim mentalities. Rape culture is not a myth. Microaggressions are real. The gender wage gap is real.”

In the end, Sommers could only partially make her remarks. An administrator — a “dean of diversity” — intervened and insisted she finish her remarks quickly because of the fuss that a few loudmouth students were causing.

Ms. Hoff Sommers summed it up best in a tweet. “Diversity Dean at Lewis and Clark was present. She approached podium in the middle of my talk and asked me to wrap up my speech and take questions. I was never able to develop my argument. Shouldn’t the dean have insisted protestors allowed me to finish, rather than cut speech short?”

Indeed. The loudest of the inmates seem to be running the asylum on college campuses. And Hoff Sommers is far from the only example of this rude treatment. Ben Shapiro, Ann Coulter, Milo Yiannopoulos, Gavin McInnes and others have all experienced harassment and even violence at their events. Yglesias and Sachs call these incidents “anecdotal.” Maybe, but when there are this many examples of such uncouth behavior, they begin to scream *trend* rather than anecdote.

Besides, the evidence of political correctness run amok is not all anecdotal. Other polls have come to different conclusions than Yglesias and Sachs. A 2017 Cato Institute poll shows that nearly three-fourths of Americans believe that political correctness, as is taught and often codified in American universities, stifles discussions that society needs to have. The Association of American Colleges and Universities did a study in 2010, which asked the question, “Is it safe to hold unpopular positions on this campus?” Only 30 percent of respondents responded that they strongly agreed such safety existed. And that number goes down the longer a student is at the university.

More and more, our universities have become centers of politically correct indoctrination rather than centers of learning. This is especially troubling since a university degree infers on a young person a certain degree of respect, which can lead to leadership. Certainly, as they enter the real world, these young people can and often do unlearn the nonsense they are subjected to at college. But what about the ones who don’t?

It’s long past time to start fighting back in our university systems — especially in our public, taxpayer funded universities. It’s time to cut public funding for universities with speech codes and safe spaces. Universities need to be places where students are exposed to all ideas, not just *approved* ideas.