

# CALGARY SINCE 1883 HERALD

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## Policy on the fly sinks university pro-life club

by JOHN CARPAY

The University of Calgary's censorship of controversial opinion on campus is just fine, according to Students' Union president Dalmy Baez. After the Students' Union (SU) decertified the Campus Pro-Life Club this past Tuesday, Baez explained to media that the university need only write a letter to a politically incorrect group, whereupon the letter instantly becomes "policy," which the group must blindly obey. To qualify as valid, a policy at the U of C need not be developed, written, published or posted, nor does "policy" need to apply equally to all students and to all student clubs.

According to Baez, when the U of C wrote to Campus Pro-Life demanding that it turn its signs inward so that passersby could not see them, Campus Pro-Life should have meekly complied with this "policy," even though the university gladly tolerates shocking photos when displayed by other campus groups.

The U of C expresses no qualms about large colour photos showing the effects of torture on political dissidents in China, the cruelty of animal testing, the consequences of spousal abuse, and other controversies. Gory and disturbing displays on campus are fine, as long as they do not convey the wrong view on abortion.

The SU removed official club status from Campus Pro-Life, claiming the club had violated the policies, procedures, constitution or bylaws of the SU or the university. At Tuesday's hearing, club members wanted to know specifically which sections of the SU's constitution, bylaws, procedures or policies had been violated. The SU refused to provide details or examples.

Club members asked what provisions of

the university's constitution, bylaws, or policies had been violated. Again, no answer from the SU.

In short, the SU did not present any evidence that Campus Pro-Life had violated any policy, procedure, bylaw or constitutional provision of the SU, or of the university. Unless, of course, the university's arbitrary and discriminatory censorship of one group's expression constitutes "policy."

The SU's position is clear: the U of C has an unfettered right to censor any speech which it dislikes, simply by making censorship demands in writing. The university does not need to justify its censorship on the basis of real and existing bylaws, policies, or regulations.

The SU's utter failure to put forward a case against Campus Pro-Life was not the only problem with Tuesday's hearing. With some of its members facing trespassing charges in court for having defied the university's censorship this past November, Campus Pro-Life asked that the meeting be adjourned until the court had determined their guilt or innocence. But the SU panel refused to adjourn the hearing.

Further, the SU panel, which decertified the Campus Pro-Life club included Alex Judd, who for three years led a pro-choice feminist group on campus.

This is no secret: the SU's own website boldly proclaims that Judd was "president of the student club Feminist Initiative Recognizing Equality for the past three years." Under her leadership, members of this feminist club have physically blocked the pro-life display on campus, trying to prevent discussion and debate from taking place. Citing an apprehension of bias, members of

Campus Pro-Life requested that Judd recuse herself from ruling on their club's status. Judd participated in the in-camera deliberations about whether or not she should step down from the SU panel.

The SU then refused the request, and Judd stayed on the panel, which went on to decertify the Campus Pro-Life club.

If the SU thinks this matter is limited to abortion, it deludes itself.

By publicly endorsing an unfettered right on the part of the U of C to censor unpopular minority speech, the SU is jeopardizing the freedom of expression of every student on campus. The SU reasons that a few complaints from people claiming to be "offended" by a controversial message should be enough to prod the university into censoring the offensive speech. The SU believes that if a group defies discriminatory censorship, it should lose its official club status for violating "policy."

Sadly, this censorship of controversial speech runs directly counter to the university's stated mission to "seek truth and disseminate knowledge." The U of C is a public institution which receives over \$500 million from Alberta taxpayers each year, presumably because it claims to be "a place of education and scholarly inquiry."

The U of C holds itself out as a tolerant and open forum for free thought and frank debate, which does not discriminate against students who hold the "wrong" view on abortion.

Unless the U of C alerts its students and the taxpaying public of an official policy against pro-life speech on it has an obligation to allow equal free expression for all points of view.