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## *Universities get failing grades on campus freedom*

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Higher education in Canada is failing its duty of fostering free inquiry, critical reflection, honest debate and the pursuit of truth. Letter grades assigned to 35 Canadian universities and student unions by the 2012 Campus Freedom Index confirm what many observers have long known: Universities are not a safe place for free speech.

Regarding their policies and principles, Canadian universities averaged a 'C' grade. The University of Toronto alone earned an 'A' by clearly and unequivocally supporting campus free speech in its policy documents. The U of T's human rights and anti-discrimination policies cannot be used to censor unpopular, controversial or politically incorrect speech. Its anti-disruption policy prohibits students (and other people) from blocking, obstructing, suppressing or interrupting speech with which they disagree. Further, security fees cannot be used as an indirect method to censor controversial or unpopular speech on campus.

However, regarding its actions and practices, the U of T is one of 12 Canadian universities to earn an 'F' for actively censoring speech on campus. Along with Carleton University and the University of Western Ontario, the U of T demands that the campus pro-life club confine its expression to an isolated room, so as not to offend passers-by with an unpopular message, while allowing every other club to use prominent, high-traffic areas on campus.

Regarding their actions and practices, 22 of the 35 universities earned a 'D' or 'F'. Only St. Thomas University earned

an 'A'. McMaster University and Wilfrid Laurier University have banned the expression "Israeli apartheid." McGill University ordered a Jewish club to refrain from calling an event "Israel A-Party" and instead suggested they call it "A Party for Israel." The University of Prince Edward Island banned an issue of The Cadre campus newspaper for containing images of the Prophet Mohammed. York University forced the cancellation of a speaking event with Middle East affairs commentator Daniel Pipes, by charging the student sponsors exorbitant security fees which they could not afford.

Simon Fraser University and the University of Calgary have knowingly condoned the physical obstruction of pro-life displays on campus: Campus Security passively observes while the peaceful expression of opinion is rendered irrelevant and meaningless by bullies using sheets and blankets to censor a message they disagree with. The University of Ottawa threatened Ann Coulter with civil and criminal penalties should she express her views incorrectly during an impending visit, then failed to provide adequate security for the event, enabling loud protesters to force its cancellation. Carleton University had members of its pro-life club arrested, handcuffed and charged with "trespassing" for attempting to express their views on campus. Dalhousie University cancelled campus events scheduled for the "too controversial" Jared Taylor and British MP George Galloway.

In all these cases, universities claim that the messages may give offence, thereby posing a threat to safety and

security. This assumes that people have a right not to be offended by what they see or hear on a university campus, and that would-be violent protesters must be appeased by censoring unpopular messages.

For free speech on campus, the only thing worse than a university is a student union. Of 35 student unions studied, 25 earned a 'D' or 'F' for their policies and principles, while 20 earned a 'D' or 'F' for their actions and practices.

The University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS) is typical, banning posters which the student union thinks are "discriminatory" or risk creating "a hostile, intimidating, threatening, or humiliating environment." Financed by mandatory dues from students, the UVSS has demanded Canada's withdrawal from NATO and NORAD; banned fraternities and sororities from recruiting on campus; banned the Canadian Forces from the UVic Career Fair; and banned the sale of Macleans Magazine over an article titled "Too Asian". The UVSS is one of six Canadian student unions to have banned the campus pro-life club, based solely on the club's beliefs. It took a lawsuit for UVSS to reinstate the club.

Making Canada's universities a safe place for free speech will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders in higher education: students, parents, faculty, alumni, donors and, especially, taxpayers.

*John Carpay and Michael Kennedy researched and wrote the 2012 Campus Freedom Index for the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms.*