

The state of free speech on campus

The Calgary-based Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (JCCF) has released its 2013 report on the state of free speech at Canadian universities and lo and behold, the report shows egregious violations on campuses nationwide. Needless to say, I'm not surprised.

The JCCF measured the policies and practices at 45 public Canadian universities, grading them each using a five-tier letter scale. In total, 23 universities received at least one "F", meaning some form of censorship was employed on campus. According to the "Campus Freedom Index," the University of Ottawa and Carleton University are the worst schools for free speech in Canada. And grass is green.

The report chronicles the same sort of censorship activities we've seen on Canadian campuses for years: pro-life groups being forced to cover their posters or quiet their protest, pro- or anti-Israel activities being tamed or censored and so-called "controversial" speakers getting their microphones turned off before they can even begin. Unfortunately, these sorts of activities are so common on Canadian campuses that we've practically come to expect them.

But new to the Campus Freedom Index this year, however, is the topic of men's issues awareness — a subject that wets the felt-tip markers of the perpetually outraged upon mere mention. The movement is a relatively recent phenomenon on Canadian campuses, where men's rights speakers and groups are usually met with protests, attempts at censorship and placards about how "Men's Rights is Misogyny." In other words: pure failure fodder for the Campus Freedom Index.

The examples are well chronicled. At the University of Toronto, last November, protesters tried to shut down a speech by Warren Farrell, author of *The Myth of Male Power* and other books on men's and women's issues. Farrell was able to deliver his address despite the rally, though campus security and Toronto Police were called to the scene. The University of Toronto Student Union later issued a release expressing its disdain for "hate speech," and denied club certification to the "Men's Issues Awareness Society" the following month for its alleged violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The student union at Ryerson University, similarly, blocked the creation of a recognized men's issues club on campus this past March. The student union justified the decision based on claims that the student group was backed by two external organizations, A Voice for Men and the Canadian

Association for Equality, which were suggested to be "hate groups" by the then-student union president.

There are other examples not cited in the JCCF report. In January, the University of Toronto Student Union actually drafted a motion to take action to block the website for A Voice for Men on its server (sites for making homemade bombs and gore sex are still OK, though). Last May, students at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia tried to halt the creation of a campus men's centre, claiming it would end up as a place to "celebrate hegemonic masculinity." And in May of this year, the Canadian Federation of Students — the umbrella student union representing 500,000 students across the country — sought to amend its policy to account for the "increase in the presence" of men's groups on Canadian campuses, telling its members that "messages from these groups claim to be of equality, but are in fact messages that are misogynist." Ah, OK.

Indeed, there's no question that some of the activities put forth by certain men's groups on and off campus are not exactly constructive. For one, there was the crop of posters that showed up on Alberta campuses over the summer that made a parody of a successful anti-rape campaign. While the message behind the parody posters was a valid one — that false claims of sexual assault can, and do, ruin men's lives — the method was tactless. Tactless, too, is the practice of "outing" and shaming prominent feminists on the website for A Voice for Men, which is, frankly, more damaging to its own brand than others. But while some of these actions may be distasteful, they certainly don't warrant blanket censorship.

Recent stories of bullied teen boys and questionable abuse allegations, should, on the other hand, compel universities and student unions to embrace discussion of men's issues on campus. After all, with all the attempts at censoring pro-life, anti-Israel, Zionist, capitalist, allegedly violent and oppressive expressions of speech on campus, you would think adding "men's issues" to the list would spread protesters a little too thin.

The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms is to be applauded for shining a light on universities' and student unions' threat to freedom of expression on Canadian campuses.