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Universities are buying 'peace' by condoning mob censorship

"I can't stand what you're saying, therefore I will silence you."

This sentiment is rapidly becoming the normal practice at Canada's public universities, which accept mob rule as a way to censor controversial ideas on campus. Christie Blatchford was invited to speak at the University of Waterloo about her book *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy*, but loud, unruly "protesters" forced the cancellation of this event in 2010. U-Waterloo's president, Dr. Hamdullahpur, learned nothing from this incident, allowing MP Stephen Woodworth to be shouted down by "protesters" in 2013, while campus security watched passively.

In April 2014, the University of Ottawa condoned the forcible shut down of a presentation by Dr. Janice Fiamengo, by "activists" who disagreed with her opinions against radical feminism. This was consistent, of course, with Ottawa-U previously allowing a mob to prevent a scheduled speaking event with controversial author Ann Coulter from taking place.

Men's Issues Awareness events at the University of Toronto and elsewhere have been blocked, disrupted and effectively shut down. Alternatively, the university administration censors these events by permitting them to proceed only if the campus club pays hundreds of dollars in "security fees" to cover the real or potential risk posed by obstructionists who disagree with the club's viewpoint. Last week's physical blocking of a pro-life display at the University of Alberta, with disruptive protesters hiding it from view entirely, is the latest example of mob censorship that is condoned by university presidents.

Disruptive protesters, who silence their opponents by making it impossible for the public to hear or see a controversial message, claim that they are merely using their own free expression rights. But even a Kindergarten student can tell the difference between making her own painting, and placing a sheet of paper on top of the painting of the girl sitting beside her. University students who cannot grasp this simple distinction have likely been educated beyond their intelligence. Put simply, preventing someone else from communicating her opinion is not the same as expressing your own.

Those who obstruct and disrupt their opponents' events claim that the opinion which they have silenced is so obviously wrong that it doesn't deserve a hearing. But who should get to determine which opinions are sufficiently odious to warrant being censored by a small mob of "protesters" or "activists"? Should people, if they feel "very" hurt and offended, be allowed to silence the peaceful expression of messages they disagree with?

Not all university presidents agree that free expression includes the right to block, obstruct and disrupt others' messages and events. In 2011, then-president of the University of British Columbia, Stephen Toope, directed campus security to uphold the free speech rights of a student pro-life group in the face of threats on Facebook to block the students' display. Campus security informed the would-be blockers that they had every right to engage in their own peaceful counter-protest, but

warned against censoring the pro-life display by obstructing it from view. Campus security protected freedom of expression from mob rule, upholding the rule of law in the best interest of everyone at UBC.

Unfortunately, University of Alberta president Indira Samarasekera has taken the opposite approach. On March 3 and 4, U of A campus security condoned the physical obstruction of a pro-life display on campus, which was set up by a registered student club with the University's permission. The Code of Student Behaviour expressly prohibits the obstruction and disruption of university-related functions, activities and events, but campus security took no action against those who broke the rules. If the campus security guards were unwilling or unable to control these "activists," they could at least have demanded to see their student ID, and commenced disciplinary proceedings against them.

Dr. Samarasekera and other university presidents are buying an artificial and very short-term "peace" by condoning the mob censorship, by physical means, of politically incorrect views on campus. In so doing, they send the message to all students that it's OK to physically shut down opinions and events one disagrees with. These university presidents undermine the free exchange and debate of ideas on campus by inviting more and more little mobs to consider: "Why debate your opponent when you can simply silence her?"

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