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University of Alberta vs. free speech

When it comes to censoring unpopular speech on campus, some universities are smarter than others.

The University of Calgary foolishly charged its own students with trespassing, and later with non-academic misconduct, for having set up a pro-life display on campus, tactics that were decisively rejected by the court in *Wilson vs. University of Calgary* last year. At Mount Royal University, security guards arrested a young man for distributing pro-life literature on campus, and detained him for several hours in a small room, with his hands cuffed painfully behind his back. After a court action was commenced, the university's president apologized for the security guards' conduct, and the court action was withdrawn.

In contrast, the University of Alberta uses more clever techniques to censor unpopular speech, by extorting "security fees" from students wishing to express controversial ideas, and by failing to enforce its own Code of Student Behaviour.

In the fall of 2014, Go-Life was subjected to having hundreds of its posters torn down by U of A students who boasted openly on Facebook about having destroyed Go-Life's property. The perpetrators of this vandalism have not been required to pay restitution for the damage they admitted causing. This in spite of express provisions in the Code that empower the University to require students to accept real and tangible consequences for their conduct.

In the weeks leading up to a campus pro-life display in March 2015, several U of A students used Facebook to urge the physical obstruction and disruption

of Go-Life's event. This recommended behaviour is expressly prohibited by the U of A, not to mention the Criminal Code of Canada. These Facebook threats also directly violated the U of A's own rules against encouraging the commission of offences.

In March, the University of Alberta Protective Services (UAPS) stood by passively while dozens of U of A students, joined by non-students (including NDP MP Linda Duncan), used mob censorship to deny other students their legal right to see Go-Life's display. UAPS did not photograph the students who physically disrupted the display, or ask to see their identification (which students are legally required to produce to university officials when asked), or inform them that their conduct was in violation of the Code. UAPS wilfully deprived itself of the information it would need to commence disciplinary proceedings against Code-violators.

Campus security can act decisively when it wants to. At Carleton University, campus security arrested and handcuffed students who tried to set up a pro-life display on campus, and frogmarched them into the waiting paddy wagon. At the University of Calgary, campus security photographed pro-life students, demanded to see their identification, and used that information to charge the students with trespassing and with non-academic misconduct. Campus security would, appropriately, not allow a mob of young conservatives to disrupt a campus NDP event, or white supremacists to shut down an aboriginal ceremony, or religious fundamentalists to disrupt a campus gay pride parade. But when it

comes to pro-choicers physically preventing people from seeing their opponents' expression, campus security guards suddenly turn into spineless weaklings. Upholding the rule of law on campus depends — mysteriously — on the identity of the group that needs protection from the mob.

After the physical obstruction of Go-Life's display in March, the club booked a classroom for a pro-life speaker. Two weeks prior to this event, the U of A informed Go-Life that the room was available for use. However, the U of A denied formal approval until minutes prior to the event's start, thereby preventing Go-Life from advertising. This rendered the event almost meaningless.

Adding insult to injury, the U of A then presented Go-Life with an invoice for hundreds of dollars because a UAPS security guard was present at the event — a service which the students had not requested. The perverse thinking that underlies the invoice — that law-abiding students must pay hundreds of dollars for the potential misconduct of law-breaking students — is completely contrary to the rule of law.

U of A president Indira Samarasekera is more clever than the University of Calgary in achieving the same result: a campus which does not provide a safe space for the free expression and debate of ideas.

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