



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 12, 2015

Orwell in the Classroom: University Spends Money to Stifle Speech

The program may seem “crazy” to many, but don’t you dare call it that. Because this is just one of many words and phrases that Orwellian social engineers at the University of Michigan deem are, well, not at all doubleplusgood. It’s part of a sensitivity-oriented “Inclusive Language Campaign” (ILC) at the public institution — funded to the tune of \$16,000. Writes [The College Fix](#):



Words declared unacceptable through the campaign include “crazy,” “insane,” “retarded,” “gay,” “tranny,” “gypped,” “illegal alien,” “fag,” “ghetto” and “raghead.” Phrases such as “I want to die” and “that test raped me” are also verboten.

University spokesman Rick Fitzgerald told *The College Fix* in an email the campaign aims to “address campus climate by helping individuals understand that their words can impact someone and to encourage individuals to commit to creating a positive campus community.”

Students have been asked to sign a pledge to “use inclusive language” and to help their peers “understand the importance of using inclusive language,” according to campaign materials.

Though only in existence for one semester, the Inclusive Language Campaign has maintained a strong presence throughout the university. Students roaming the campus frequently encounter posters of all sizes reminding them: “YOUR WORDS MATTER,” and asking questions such as: “If you knew that I grew up in poverty, would you still call things ‘ghetto’ and ‘ratchet’?”

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The ILC’s Facebook page also provides Halloween tips on “how to create costumes [sic] not stereotypes.”

Yet the ILC has method to its madness (or would that be “mentally challengedness”?). A few of the explanations offered for the speech code are:

- “I want to die” “is offensive toward people who have attempted suicide” (and, presumably, those who’ve succeeded).
- “That’s so gay” “perpetuates homophobia.”
- “That’s retarded” “perpetuates ableism.”
- “Tranny” “perpetuates transphobia.”

This is all very sensitive, but a few things remain unanswered. If your car breaks down, can you explain that the tranny went? If you’re from the U.K. and crave a cigarette, can you say, “[Slap me a fag, man](#)”?



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And if this is stifled, is it insensitivity to others' cultural language norms? If you throw a Paris-themed party, can you report that the atmosphere was festive and gay? Can you use the term "ratchet" if you need to describe, as Dictionary.com [defines it](#), "a toothed bar with which a pawl engages"? Can you characterize someone as an illegal alien if he lacks a visa and really is from another planet?

Social-media users were having their fun, too. The top comment under the *College Fix* article is by a Dave Daly, who writes of the University of Michigan (U of A), "Parents who paid tuition to this institution got gypped."

Yet the issue is no joke. Although Fitzgerald said the ILC guidelines are "educational, not regulatory," they reflect a modern academia that strongly advocates free speech — as long as that speech is free from truth.

For instance, *Campus Reform* [reported](#) just this Tuesday that "school administrators and campus police at Blinn College threatened to kick a student off campus for trying to sign up her peers for a new conservative club," and lied to her in the process, even though she was in a "designated free speech zone." The site also [tells us](#) that in 2009, the U of M "[threatened](#) to evict a conservative student newspaper[,] and last week, a sign promoting an upcoming lecture by syndicated conservative columnist Jonah Goldberg [went missing](#) from the university's campus quad." Moreover, late last year at the U of M, conservative Muslim student columnist Omar Mahmood was [suspended](#) from his newspaper for creating a "hostile environment" after writing a piece of satire. And these individuals simply join the long list of speakers (such as pundit Ann Coulter) and students who have been suppressed, boycotted, shouted down, and even attacked for having the "wrong" opinions.

Even some liberals are sounding the alarm. After Democrat Jonathan Chait [wrote](#) about Mahmood's case and accused the "language police" of "perverting liberalism," a left-wing Purdue University Ph.D. student named Fredrik deBoer offered his own testimonials (hat tip: the *College Fix*). He [writes](#):

I have seen, with my own two eyes, a 19 year old white woman — smart, well-meaning, passionate — literally run crying from a classroom because she was so ruthlessly brow-beaten for using the word "disabled." Not repeatedly. Not with malice. Not because of privilege. She used the word once and was excoriated for it. She never came back.

... I have seen, with my own two eyes, a 20 year old black man, a track athlete who tried to fit organizing meetings around classes and his ridiculous practice schedule (for which he received a scholarship worth a quarter of tuition), be told not to return to those meetings because he said he thought there were such a thing as innate gender differences. He wasn't a homophobe, or transphobic, or a misogynist.... But those were the terms deployed against him, those and worse. So that was it; he was gone.

I have seen, with my own two eyes, a 33 year old Hispanic man, an Iraq war veteran who had served three tours and had become an outspoken critic of our presence there, be lectured about patriarchy by an affluent 22 year old white liberal arts college student, because he had said that other vets have to "man up" and speak out about the war. Because apparently we have to pretend that we don't know how metaphorical language works or else we're bad people. I watched his eyes glaze over as this woman with \$300 shoes berated him.

There are people you're allowed to offend, however. For example, Brown University columnist Peter Makhlof recently [characterized](#) the ROTC as comprising "criminals." Yet even though this made students participating in such programs feel unwelcome, he has not suffered Mahmood's fate and been



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suspended. And what of “white privilege”? The concept stigmatizes white people as not only unfairly advantaging themselves but also being too oblivious to their privilege to even have a serious opinion on the matter and is offensive to millions; academia not only tolerates the term, however, but even teaches courses on the concept.

This gets at the larger problem with laws and rules based on offensiveness. Much like the notion your “gender” can be whatever you desire, it’s a denial and rejection of objective reality in favor of subjectivity. But most everyone is offended by something, and most everything offends someone. Since not everything can be prohibited, however, we must still discriminate when determining who will be shown “sensitivity.” And without reference to an objective standard, this can only be done based on subjective judgments themselves. But whose will they be?

Those with the power.

Thus, while the sensitivity movement is billed as an agent of fairness, it’s quite the opposite. It’s akin to trading the rules of baseball — equally applied to everyone — for the capricious determinations of an all-powerful umpire imposing his own feelings-derived biases. Following this path, one could see how a society of thieves, or one where bandits hold the reins of power, would stigmatize both honest people and the term “theft.” Why, they might even conjure up a euphemism such as, oh, let’s say, “redistributive justice.”

And with this dislocation from reason and perspective on speech prevailing in academia, perhaps it’s no wonder that some Americans were willing to sign a 2013 [petition to repeal](#) the First Amendment.



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