



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on November 5, 2015

Poll of College Students Reveals Little Regard for Free Speech

Freedom of speech may be protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but a recent poll of college students reveals that it is not that highly valued a commodity on American campuses.

According to a recent poll of 800 undergraduates across the country conducted by McLaughlin & Associates and sponsored by Yale University's William F. Buckley, Jr. program, 30 percent of students who identify as "liberal" believe the First Amendment is outdated. In addition, a majority (51 percent) of students favor speech codes on the campus, and 16 percent want even more control of free speech.



Perhaps in light of the fact that 32 percent of responding students were unable to even name which amendment to the Constitution specifically deals with freedom of speech, these answers should not be shocking.

Thirty-five percent of the students stated that so-called hate speech is not protected under the First Amendment, with only 42 percent believing that it *should* be protected.

The survey also asked for a response to the statement, "My college or university should forbid people from speaking on campus who have a history of engaging in hate speech." Fifty-two percent of the students agreed.

One presumes that the previous question was in regard to guest speakers. But what about the free exchange of ideas among the students and faculty already on the campus? A startling 72 percent of those queried agreed that "Any student or faculty member on campus who uses language that is considered racist, sexist, homophobic or otherwise offensive should be subject to disciplinary action."

One must ask: Who will make these judgments as to what is racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive? After all, the accusation of racism is thrown around incredibly loosely today. In some circles, simply opposing a policy position of President Obama is considered racist. Others call the Catholic Church sexist for its doctrinal position of not ordaining women to the priesthood. A Christian student or faculty member who believes the Bible is the word of God will be labelled homophobic by many.

And how much more vague can an accusation be than "otherwise offensive"? The very existence of conservative political, economic, or social views is offensive to the American Left.

An article about "political correctness" in *The Austrian* (published by the Mises Institute and formerly known as *The Free Market*) addressed this issue, stating, "A plurality of all Americans — and a clear majority of progressives — fully support criminalizing supposed hate speech. And presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton pledges to wield federal hate crime legislation like a billy club."



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But, as the article added, “Academia is the greatest offender. Universities exist to pursue truth, not advance a political agenda. But the modern college student is forced to navigate a system designed to make him duller, poorer, and filled with bad ideas.”

The recent McLaughlin poll also asked the college students about professors using “trigger warnings”: the required warnings in advance if assigned material contains anything that *might* “trigger” difficult emotional responses for students. Sixty-three percent favor these warnings.

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) opposes trigger warnings, citing a policy of Oberlin College that cautions faculty members to remove “triggering material” when it does not “contribute directly to course learning goals.” The AAUP has expressed concern for all faculty members facing “charges of this kind,” noting that non-tenured and adjunct instructors are “particularly at risk.”

Trigger warnings will cause professors to delete some material from their course, for fear that it might lead to an “emotional response” from at least one student. According to the AAUP, “Trigger warnings thus run the risk of reducing complex literary, historical, sociological and political insights to a few negative characterizations.”

When considering why America has turned so far Left in the past few decades, one must realize the incredibly important role that formal education — from kindergarten to graduate school — plays in shaping public opinion. Graduates from U.S. colleges and universities tend to provide leadership in political parties, city councils, state legislatures, businesses, churches, and in the halls of Congress.

While the AAUP and the Mises Institute know that the role of the university should be to pursue truth, what is being pursued on most modern college campuses is the indoctrination of students and faculty alike in secularism and statism. Far too often, students who dare to express openly a Christian worldview, or an inclination toward limited government and free enterprise — or as this survey reveals, a belief in something as fundamental as free speech itself — face ostracism, low grades, and ugly accusations of racism, sexism, and homophobia. In the case of faculty members, they may be denied promotion and tenure.

As Murray Rothbard wrote in *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature*, “An egalitarian society can only hope to achieve its goals by totalitarian methods of coercion.” Speech codes and disciplinary action for alleged racism, sexism, and homophobia are totalitarian by their very nature.

The McLaughlin poll demonstrates what many advocates of liberty have long suspected: Far too often, the modern college campus is no friend of liberty, but rather its enemy.

Steve Byas is a professor of history at Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College in Moore, Oklahoma. His recently published book, History’s Greatest Libels, challenges many of the “politically correct” attacks of the Left on some great figures in history, such as Christopher Columbus and Joseph McCarthy.



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