

Campus Climate and Freedom of Expression

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The Social Context

“Group polarization is a human regularity, but social context can decrease, increase, or even eliminate it. For present purposes, the most important point is that **group polarization will significantly increase if people think of themselves, antecedently or otherwise, as part of a group having a shared identity and a degree of solidarity.** If, for example, a group of people in an Internet discussion group think of themselves as opponents of high taxes, or advocates of animal rights, their discussions are likely to move toward extreme positions. As this happens to many different groups, polarization is both more likely and more extreme.”

-- Cass Sunstein, *The Daily We*

The Role of Social Media and “Filter Bubbles”

“If you take all of these filters together, you take all these algorithms, you get what I call a filter bubble. **And your filter bubble is your own personal, unique universe of information that you live in online.** And what's in your filter bubble depends on who you are, and it depends on what you do. But the thing is that you don't decide what gets in. And more importantly, you don't actually see what gets edited out. . . . If algorithms are going to curate the world for us, if they're going to decide what we get to see and what we don't get to see, then we need to make sure that they're not just keyed to relevance. **We need to make sure that they also show us things that are uncomfortable or challenging or important”**

Eli Pariser, *Beware online "filter bubbles"*

Motivated Reasoning

“Motivated reasoning theory identifies that directional goals enhance the accessibility of knowledge structures (memories, information, knowledge) that are consistent with desired conclusions. . . . Milton Lodge and Charles Taber (2000) introduce an empirically supported model in which affect is intricately tied to cognition, and **information processing is biased toward support for positions that the individual already holds.**”

Wikipedia

The University

“An unyielding allegiance to freedom of speech -- even controversial, contentious and unpopular speech – is indispensable to accomplishing the multiple goals of the . . . University. These goals include: developing the analytic and communication skills of students; generating cutting-edge research and creative discovery; preparing graduates to become active, informed citizens and leaders of today’s sometimes unpleasantly combative public and private spheres; and formulating and implementing policy solutions for complex social and environmental problems . . . **The University is thus committed to facilitating and protecting a wide-ranging and open exchange of competing ideas, hypotheses, perspectives and values**” (President Killeen)

The University as a “liberal” institution

- Committed to pluralism (however imperfectly)
- Rights-based policies
 - Academic freedom
 - Free speech
 - Rights of free assembly and protest
- What are the limits of these rights? What happens when competing rights conflict?

“Hate speech”

- What counts as “hate speech”?
- Hate speech versus incitement
- Criticizing, challenging hate speech versus disrupting, banning it
- Hate speech is still constitutionally protected speech
- “The greatest threat to free speech on campus is hypocrisy, when defenders of free expression with good intentions fail to apply their own principles to people they despise” John K. Wilson, AAUP

Free Speech vs Safe Spaces

“Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called trigger warnings, we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual ‘safe spaces’ where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.”

John Ellison, dean of students, University of Chicago

The Educational Criterion

“In thinking about reforms, it is important to have a sense of the problems we aim to address, and some possible ways of addressing them. If the discussion thus far is correct, there are three fundamental concerns from the democratic point of view. These include: **(a) the need to promote exposure to materials, topics, and positions that people would not have chosen in advance, or at least enough exposure to produce a degree of understanding and curiosity; (b) the value of a range of common experiences; (c) the need for exposure to substantive questions of policy and principle, combined with a range of positions on such questions.**”

-- Cass Sunstein, *The Daily We*