

EDITORIAL

Free speech remains essential

Since 2005, the third week of October has been known as "Free Speech Week," a nonpartisan event dedicated to the First Amendment and its importance in American democracy.

The First Amendment, probably the most well-known article of the Bill of Rights, legally enshrines an individual's right to speak, think, believe and associate according to their own free will. All government bodies, as well as institutions that receive government funding, such as public universities and colleges, are required to uphold and respect these rights.

In a sort of romanticized way, higher education has always had a reputation of being a breeding ground for ideas, a "free marketplace" for thought. The young and college educated were always the thorn in the side of the established orthodoxy.

In recent times though, this reputation has begun to fall away and to many—whether justified or not—higher education and free speech have become almost opposites.

In universities and colleges across the country, the right of students to speak, think, believe and associate according to their own free will has come under attack. Sometimes it is by the administration, or members of the student body or an outside organization such as local governments or lobbying groups.

Before we continue, it is important to state that there are rightful limits to speech, and in many cases college administrations must make difficult decisions in identifying and enforcing those limits. It is not only the duty of an institution to preserve the right to discourse, but also to preserve a culture and environment that allows it to flourish.

The marketplace for thought relies on respectful and meaningful discourse. Hateful, destructive and bigoted ideas are never respectful and never meaningful. Ideas that exclude, belittle and dehumanize others add nothing to the culture of Del Mar College or any other institution.

Last month, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) released its annual College Free Speech ranking. The ranking judges major universities based on a number of factors including: the perceived ability for students to have difficult discussions, tolerance of different political ideas, and administrative support for free and meaningful discourse. The data is gathered by engaging with students on campus and getting their perspective, rather than reviewing specific written policies at institution. The institution is then assigned a score between 0 and 100.

Among the lowest ranking schools are Dartmouth, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Texas, and at the very bottom, Harvard. In fact, only one Ivy League college ranked anything above a 40, that being Brown University with a 52.86.

It is a troubling trend that some of America's most prestigious schools, where many of the country's future leadership will arise from, have some of the lowest scores in the country when it comes to exercising the First Amendment.

Obviously, the reality of the world isn't defined by numbers in a PDF file. There



ANDREW PERALES | FOGHORN NEWS

are real tangible examples as recent as this year that demonstrate this reality.

In November of 2022, graduate students at the University of California, Irvine, had gone on strike to advocate for higher pay and improved working conditions. The university attempted, and regrettably succeeded, in preventing undergrad and graduate students from using the university's email platform to voice support for the strike.

In January of this year, the university allowed the graduate student government to release a message explaining the censorship.

In August 2021, FIRE filed a lawsuit against Clovis Community College, stating that the administration allegedly attempted to censor the campus chapter of Young Americans for Freedom, using its policy against "inappropriate or offensive language" to remove flyers promoting anti-communist and pro-life viewpoints.

The lawsuit is still ongoing. Conservatives on campus are not the only ones who find their First Amend-

ment rights infringed upon, as progressive voices have also faced severe backlash from campus administrations.

In March of this year, West Texas A&M came under fire after the university president, Walter Wender, canceled a drag show organized by an LGBT+ student organization on campus, Spectrum WT. Wender voiced his disapproval of the event in an email to students and employees of the college, stating that he would not condone such speech "even when the law of the land appears to require it."

FIRE filed a lawsuit on behalf of Spectrum WT, which is still ongoing.

Incidents like these have only grown more common as more and more controversial topics begin to take center stage in the news and on social media.

With all of these examples in mind, it is not hard to see why it is important that Del Mar College upholds its commitment

to protecting student speech. It is also important that we have organizations like FIRE and the American Civil Liberties Union that exist to keep our First Amendment rights safe.

As students, it is easy to forget that the health and quality of our academic environment also relies on us. Part of that is having the confidence to actually exercise the rights we have and then keeping the same confidence when we must inevitably face down the consequences.

It also includes being able to face down ideas and thoughts that you might honestly despise.

Any number of quotes from dead guys can back up that sentiment. "Free speech is meant for the thoughts that you don't like" is not a new concept, but it is an important one. Just remember that it is also for you because someone somewhere does not like your thoughts.

MORE ON FIRE

To see the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's annual College Free Speech rankings, or for help from the group, visit www.thefire.org.

ASK THE WIKINGS

QUESTION: WHAT SONG DESCRIBES YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW AND WHY?



"Probably 'I'm Enough' by Oscar Schiller and Katie Gavin because I tended to struggle with self-worth and it's hard to feel understood sometimes— but this song helped me with that."

— Alondra "Ali" Olvera, Liberal Arts



"I'd say 'Running on Empty' by Jackson Brown. I like it because I think he's just touching back on where he's been in life and where he's going."

— Sean McGuire, Liberal Arts



"'This Cowboys Hat' by Chris Ledoux. I think people would understand each other more if they sat down and talked with one another and just saw the other side of the coin."

— Zachary Merrill, Electrical Engineering



"'TQM' by Fuerza Regida. I also like the beat. That's it."

— Ariana Gonzalez, Business