

Campus Muzzles 2022

Harvey Silverglate and Emily Nayer

Georgetown Law School

The saga of Georgetown Law School's former faculty member, Ilya Shapiro, although a bit distant from New England, is simply too good – and too illustrative -- to omit from the Campus Muzzles merely on the basis of geography.

Shapiro was newly hired to teach at this well-known, highly regarded school located in Washington, DC. He is generally considered a political conservative, and hence in a minority in academia. This past January, just prior to his Georgetown appointment, he said publicly that it was objectionable for President Joseph Biden to have announced, in advance, a promise to appoint a Black woman to the first seat on the Supreme Court that opened during the Biden presidency.

Just before Shapiro was scheduled to become the executive director at Georgetown's Center for the Constitution, Shapiro tweeted: "Objectively best pick for Biden is Sri Srinivasan, who is solid prog & v smart. Even has identity politics benefit of being first Asian (Indian) American. But alas doesn't fit into the latest intersectionality hierarchy so we'll get lesser black woman. Thank heaven for small favors?" Although written unartfully and somewhat distastefully, Shapiro's tweet was protected by academic freedom as it merely demonstrated his disapproval of Biden's focus on the new Supreme Court justice's race and gender. Shapiro believed, as did many, that Biden should appoint on the basis of intellectual fitness, rather than race. He opined that it was unfair to any Black female candidate who would be named for there to be even a hint that race and gender accounted for the appointment, since the public would assume that race and gender, not intellect, was the major factor. Shapiro did not claim that somehow a Black appointee would be inferior to any other but, rather, that solely focusing on the appointee's race and gender disregards credentials, intellect, and worth for a SCOTUS appointment and excludes people of other racial and gender identities who may be better candidates (such as Srinivasan).

Shapiro's perfectly reasonable statement produced the predictable howls of outrage from the academic community – students and faculty at Georgetown. The school's Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Affirmative Action issued a report that concluded that Shapiro had "denigrated an individual based on race, gender, and sex." Demands that he be fired for cause began to pile up. The Georgetown administration predictably sided with Shapiro's critics, publicly stating that it wanted to fire him, but demurring because of what it deemed a technicality as he had not yet been formally a faculty member when he made the offending statement.

Shapiro deleted his tweet and apologized and yet, ironically, his apology had exacerbated his problem. He had made the mistake of seeming to concede that there was in fact something wrong with his perfectly reasonable statement. His contrition, in this sense, simply further empowered the mob.

In the end, Shapiro resigned from Georgetown, since he was made increasingly uncomfortable by – to use the language of the "equity and inclusion" community – the increasingly "hostile" environment in which he realized it would be difficult for him to teach. As he wrote to the administration in his letter of resignation: "You told me when we met last week that you want me to be successful in my new role and that you will 'have my back.' Instead, you've painted a target on my back such that I could never do the job I was hired for."

For its incredibly cowardly and ill-considered conduct, we award a Campus Muzzle to Georgetown Law.

MIT

One of the more remarkable aspects of censorship on college campuses is that it affects even those institutions of higher education that are devoted to science and scientific method – the notion that theories are subjected to constant testing, with truth emerging on the basis of hard-and-fast results. Pursuant to scientific method, no theory can be rejected unless scientific testing proves it to be in error.

This is why the phenomenon of censorship at a place like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (“MIT”) is so jarring. It is at such institutions, more than any other, that one expects to hear all kinds of theories and opinions, and to see them tested. And yet, MIT has been responsible for an incomprehensible act of censorship within the last year.

MIT has a long-standing prestigious annual lecture series whereby an accomplished scholar is invited to deliver an address – the John Carlson Lecture in the Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences. MIT chose to invite Professor Dorian Abbot, an associate professor of geophysical sciences at the University of Chicago, to deliver the lecture on October 21st of last year.

However, such was not to be. A crescendo of criticism arose at MIT over the selection of Abbott. The reason for this veritable explosion was the fact that Abbott is opposed to the academic mantra of the day, namely “diversity, equity and inclusion.” Abbott is firmly a rationalist – as a scientist, he looks at evidence and then draws conclusions. He favors working with scientists, scholars, professors, and students who are extremely intelligent and whose work has demonstrated their intelligence and insights. He is opposed to affirmative action and contends that individuals should be assessed by “their merit and qualifications alone.”

Abbott’s approach is, of course, anathema to the “equity and inclusion” crowd. Scholars such as he is deemed racist and insensitive to the needs and feelings of disadvantaged students. Of course, there was not the slightest bit of evidence of racism or any other such phenomenon. Abbott was simply acting as a scientist and stating his opinion. Yet this institution devoted to science and rationality actually succumbed to pressure and cancelled the Carlson Lecture. MIT offered Abbot the opportunity instead to present his theories directly to faculty members in lieu of giving a public lecture, but Abbott understandably turned down that attempted cop-out. Abbott apparently got the hint: The search for truth was not in a healthy condition at one of the world’s leading scientific institutions. Instead, MIT was doing everything it could to make its students feel more comfortable.

Abbott remains at the University of Chicago, which has long enjoyed a well-earned reputation for respect for free speech for its students as well as faculty.

And for this example of institutional cowardice, MIT has well-earned its Campus Muzzle.

Princeton University

On May 23rd, Princeton University's Board of Trustees voted to dismiss Joshua Katz, a classics professor, over an intimate relationship that he had with a student in the mid-2000s.

Now, according to Princeton's policies, a professor is prohibited from having such a relationship with a student. Thus, Katz being fired over such a relationship would make sense – that is, if things were that simple. In fact, in 2018, Katz had already been disciplined for this relationship, having been suspended without pay for an entire year. Nevertheless, a second round of investigations ensued, with new violations supposedly committed by Katz brought to light.

However, these events did not randomly come about. The factors that had sparked the rerun of the investigations related to Katz's political stance. On July 8th, 2020, he wrote an article for *Quillette* rebuking the letter that several of his Princeton faculty members signed demanding anti-racist changes and accommodations. Although he agreed with some of their demands, Katz disapproved of the ones that, if permitted, would greatly spread anti-racist indoctrination. He contended that professors of color at Princeton are already privileged as is (since they teach at a highly prestigious university) and therefore, do not need more privileges. He opposed the required teaching of racism as being foundational to the history of the United States, arguing against such dogmatic instruction. He disagreed with the removal of John Witherspoon's statue on campus due to Witherspoon's history of slave-ownership because Katz believed no person can be totally virtuous and be expected to have a completely pristine past. He called the Black Justice League a "small local terrorist organization" due to its non-agreeable behaviors. He expressed fear over faculty members' publications and research being monitored for racist theories or notions. In short, Katz wrote a persuasive letter expressing his distinctive views on the anti-racist proposals made by his fellow faculty members. He issued no threats. He gave no incentive to violence. He simply practiced his right of free speech.

And yet, Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber publicly condemned Katz for his letter, proclaiming that "while free speech permits students and faculty to make arguments that are bold, provocative, or even offensive, we all have an obligation to exercise that right responsibly. Joshua Katz failed to do so, and I object personally and strongly to his false description of a Princeton student group as a 'local terrorist organization.'" Eisgruber further refused to remove Katz's name from Princeton's website "Known and Be Heard," a website that discusses the injustices to minority groups and the boundaries of free speech (and expression) and racist conduct, ironically claiming that the website is for educational purposes and that removing Katz's name would constitute censorship. It is clear that Eisgruber has succumbed to the wrath of the progressives, unwilling to remain unbiased and therefore failing in his duty as a university president to provide students with an intellectually stimulating and diverse education.

Shortly after Katz's article in *Quillette* was published, his relationship with the student from the mid-2000s resurfaced as a result of a report published in the *Daily Princetonian*, accusing him of numerous violations with little corroborating evidence. Plus, as mentioned before, Katz had already faced disciplinary action for that relationship. His firing, therefore, is a clear result of the efforts of the woke mob at Princeton.

Congratulations go to Princeton University. It's won a Campus Muzzle.