

The reasons for free speech – or why we should be open to argument, not enforced silence:

- 1) One of life's most important skills is how to argue effectively: how to use reason, evidence, and logic to confront views we disagree with. A better understanding of opposing arguments allows us to counter those arguments more skillfully and to defend our own arguments more forcefully.
- 2) The view that marginalized students need protection from hearing things that might be offensive can be paternalistic and potentially demeaning. It is also counterproductive, if our students do not learn how to argue against the hateful views (which can be prevalent outside of Williams). It can also feed the misconception that students are weak (i.e. "snowflakes"). Finally, instead of suppressing hate, the suppression of inflammatory speakers can inflame the situation even more.
- 3) "If a story is inaccurate, refute it with facts, don't shoot the messenger." This is the most effective path to combat bad ideas and change society for the better.
- 4) When a speaker is disinvited it sends the message that the college endorses the content of every talk. This is both an error and impractical: we can never know the exact content of any speaker's talk ahead of time, and it is impossible for a pluralistic institution to endorse every single talk.

Why the Chicago Statement?

- 1) The Chicago statement has already been adopted by many institutions, including many peer institutions. By adopting this statement we would join this group of colleges and universities strengthening the message that colleges are open to debate while weakening right-wing talking points that colleges are intolerant.
- 2) We don't need to reinvent the wheel – the Chicago statement is written in clear language by a group of legal scholars and professors, has gained significant media attention (from many different perspectives), and has been adopted by many other institutions. In addition, it still leaves room to limit certain types of speech: "[the college] may restrict expression that violates the law, that falsely defames a specific individual, that constitutes a genuine threat or harassment, that unjustifiably invades substantial privacy or confidentiality interests, or that is otherwise directly incompatible with the functioning of the college. In addition, [the college] may reasonably regulate the time, place, and manner of expression to ensure that it does not disrupt the ordinary activities of the college."

3) Reinventing the wheel may take years and many hours of committee work. It is possible that a situation regarding “free speech vs. hate speech” will occur before such work can be done. We can signal to students now our commitment to rational debate and the importance of the items above, and, if necessary, spend our time on the important task of following up with campus-wide programming and education.

A final reminder – the Chicago statement **DOES NOT** deal with whom to invite. It only gives guidelines on what to do once a speaker is invited. It gives the right to peaceful protesting, but prohibits violence and disruptions to the talk. It **does not** preclude a discussion of what makes an acceptable speaker!

“We bind ourselves to an impoverished choice set if we believe that we can either punish speech or validate it. There is a middle position, expressed in Brandeis’s dictum of “more speech,” that allows us to respond without punishing. In the face of hate speech, the call for more speech is not merely an option; it is a professional or even moral obligation.” Frederick M. Lawrence