

Free Inquiry on Campus

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Free Inquiry on Campus: A Statement of Principles by over One Hundred Middlebury College Professors

ON MARCH 2, 2017, ROUGHLY 100 OF OUR 2500 STUDENTS prevented a controversial visiting speaker, Dr. Charles Murray, from communicating with his audience on the campus of Middlebury College. Afterwards, a group of unidentified assailants mobbed the speaker, and one of our faculty members was seriously injured. In view of these unacceptable acts, we have produced and affixed our signatures to this document stating core principles that seem to us unassailable in the context of higher education within a free society.

Our statement of principles first appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/middleburys-statement-of-principle-1488846993>) on March 7, 2017.

The principles are as follows:

Genuine higher learning is possible only where free, reasoned, and civil speech and discussion are respected.

Only through the contest of clashing viewpoints do we have any hope of replacing mere opinion with knowledge.

The incivility and coarseness that characterize so much of American politics and culture cannot justify a response of incivility and coarseness on the college campus.

The impossibility of attaining a perfectly egalitarian sphere of free discourse can never justify efforts to silence speech and debate.

Exposure to controversial points of view does not constitute violence.

Students have the right to challenge and to protest non-disruptively the views of their professors and guest speakers.

A protest that prevents campus speakers from communicating with their audience is a coercive act.

No group of professors or students has the right to act as final arbiter of the opinions that students may entertain.

No group of professors or students has the right to determine for the entire community that a question is closed for discussion.

The purpose of college is not to make faculty or students comfortable in their opinions and prejudices.

The purpose of education is not the promotion of any particular political or social agenda.

The primary purpose of higher education is the cultivation of the mind, thus allowing for intelligence to do the hard work of assimilating and sorting information and drawing rational conclusions.

A good education produces modesty with respect to our own intellectual powers and opinions as well as openness to considering contrary views.

All our students possess the strength, in head and in heart, to consider and evaluate challenging opinions from every quarter.

We are steadfast in our purpose to provide all current and future students an education on this model, and we encourage our colleagues at colleges across the country to do the same.

Signed,

Jay Parini, English and American Literatures

Keegan Callanan, Political Science

Julia Alvarez, Writer-in-Residence Emeritus

Molly Anderson, Food Studies

Glenn Andres, History of Art and Architecture

Christopher Andrews, Computer Science

Ata Anzali, Religion

Jason Arndt, Psychology and Neuroscience

David H. Bain, English and American Literatures/Creative Writing

Alexandra Baker, Russian

Mireille Barbaud-McWilliams, French