**Rhetorical Situation**

**Activity One: Commencement Speech Analysis**

**Part One: Prereading—quick write**

* Do you think that we as a society are more or less likely to tell the truth than previous generations?
* Why do we Instagram ourselves? Does our Instagram—social media self-reveal our true selves?

**Part Two: Note taking**

View the sections of two speeches, the first speech is by Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngoze Adichie at Harvard university in 2018. The second speech is my Tara Westover the author of *Education* at Northeastern University in 2019. The entire speeches and transcripts of the speeches are listed below

Notes on the Speech-Take notes on each of the following areas

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Elements | Adichie, Harvard, 2018, “Above All Else Do Not Lie” | Westover, Northeastern, 2019  “The Un-Instagram able Self” |
| Exigence and purpose-what brings the speaker here? What is the purpose of the speech? Is this explicitly or implicitly made? (where in the speech is this?) |  |  |
| Context/Audience—where is it? What values and beliefs does the speaker share with her audience? |  |  |
| Delivery and Style-how is the speech delivered? What choices does the speaker make to  impact her audience? |  |  |
| Arrangement-how do the introduction and conclusion connect to the purpose? |  |  |

Write a paragraph on a separate sheet of paper in which you select one of the speeches and respond to the following questions:

* What was the speaker’s purpose?
* What was the thesis of their argument?
* What evidence did they use to support this thesis?
* What rhetorical choices did the speaker employ to achieve those purposes?
* How were those strategies appropriate (or not appropriate for her audience)?

Part 3: Thesis writing and supporting claims

Select one of the positions from one of the speeches. Write an original thesis statement in which you take your own position on the issue. The thesis should state the issue, your position, and why you take that position. Then write down two reasons why you take that position.

Thesis

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| --- |
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Reason One

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Reason Two

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| --- |
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**Acivity Two: Simulation**

Activity : Commencement Speaker Simulation

Part One: Read the three articles on selecting commencement speakers and free speech on campus and take notes

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Topic | Tim Evans Indianapolis Star article on Mike Pence commencement speech | Alex Morey  Campuses Concede to Political Correctness on Commencement  USA Today | Jim Sleeper  Political Correctness and Its Real Enemies  NY Times |
| Claim |  |  |  |
| Evidence |  |  |  |

Write a paragraph in which you take a position on the boycott of controversial commencement speakers

Part Two: In your group you will assigned one of the following roles. This person is on a committee of six to select a commencement speaker at Grantland University, a large public state university of 30,000 students. From that perspective you are to do the following three things.

* Write a one paragraph biography of the person you have
* From that individual’s perspective, create a list of five to seven criteria for selecting a commencement speaker
* Select a currently living, actual person to serve as a commencement speaker. Explain in a paragraph your decision

Jordan Tate, a graduating senior in STEMS

Marshall Foster, a graduating senior in liberal arts

Dr. Martinez, a business professor

Dr. Lee, a history professor

Morgan Pierce, a university administrator

Cameron Franklin, CEO of one of the largest corporations in the state who serves on the university’s board of trustees

Readings For Activity One:

Tara Westover full video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOO1d2yuTp0>

Tara Westover Text

<https://speakola.com/grad/tara-westover-the-uninstagrammable-self-northeastern-2019>

Adichie Harvard Speech Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrAAEMFAG9E>

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Harvard Speech Transcript

<https://speakola.com/grad/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-harvard-class-day-2018>

[**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: 'Above all else, do not lie', Harvard University Class Day - 2018**](https://speakola.com/grad/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-harvard-class-day-2018)

23 May 2018, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Good afternoon.  
Harvard class of 2018, hello.  
Thank you so much for asking me to be here today, it meant a lot to me, to know that you the students select the class day speaker. Thank you.  
Congratulations to you and to all your loved ones who are here.

I spent a wonderful year at the Radcliffe Institute here at Harvard, doing a fellowship in 2011 and I fell in love with Cambridge and so it’s very good to be back.  
My name is Chimamanda, in Igbo it means my personal spirit will never be broken. I’m not sure why but some people find it difficult to pronounce, a few years ago I spoke at an event in London, the English woman who was to introduce me had written my name phonetically on the piece of paper, and backstage she held on tightly to this paper while repeating the pronunciation over and over. I could tell, she was very eager to get it right.  
And then she went on to the stage and gave a lovely introduction and ended with the words ‘ladies and gentlemen please welcome chimichanga.’

I told this story at a dinner party shortly afterwards and one of the guests seemed very annoyed that I was laughing about it, ‘that was so insulting’ he said ‘that English woman could have tried harder.’ But the truth is she did try very hard, in fact she ended up calling me a fried burrito because she had tried very hard and then ended up with an utterly human mistake. That was the result of anxiety.  
So, the point of this story is not to say that you can call me chimichanga. The point is that intent matters, that context matters. Somebody might very well call me chimichanga out of a malicious desire to mock my name and that I would certainly not laugh about, for there is a difference between malice mistake and a mistake.  
We now live in a culture of calling out, a culture of outrage, and you should call people out, you should be outraged, but always remember context and never disregard intent.

If I were asked the title of my address today, I would say Above all else do not lie or don’t lie too often, which is really to say tell the truth. But lying, the word, the idea, the act has such political potency in America today, but it somehow feels more apt. Above all else do not lie.

I grew up in Nigeria through military dictatorship and through incipient democracies and America always felt aspirational when yet another absurd thing happened politically, we would say, this can never happen in America. But today the political discourse in America includes questions that are straight from the land of the absurd. Questions such as should we call a lie a lie? When is a lie a lie?  
And so, class of 2018 at no time has it felt as agent as now that we must protect and value the truth.  
Before I tell you about lying, I must first admit to lying. I routinely lie about my height even at the doctor’s office. In Lagos when I am meeting friends for lunch, I lie about being stuck in traffic when I’m really still at home only just getting dressed.  
Now there are other lies, sadly however, I cannot tell you without having to kill you afterwards. But what I know is that I have always felt my best and done my best when I fear toward the truth when I don’t lie and my biggest regrets of my life are those times when I did not have the courage to embrace the truth.  
Now telling the truth does not mean that everything will work out, actually it sometimes doesn’t. I’m not telling you to tell the truth because it will always work out, but because you will sleep well at night. And there’s nothing more beautiful than to wake up every day holding in your hand the full measure of your integrity.

Many years ago, before my first novel was published, I attended a writer’s conference here in the US. It was a gathering of many aspiring writers and a few established writers. Now the former, the aspiring writers sucking up to the latter, the established writers – was a revered ritual of the conference and so during one of the breaks I walked up to a man, an established writer whose name I knew well but whose work had not read. I shook his hand and told him what a fan I was, ‘I love your work’ I said. His wife was sitting next to him, ‘Which of his books have you read?’ she asked and I froze. ‘which have you read?’ she asked again.

Everyone at the table was quiet, watching, waiting. I smiled a mad smile, and I mumbled ‘the one about the man discovering himself’ which of course was complete bullshit.

But I thought it might be convincing because that kind of describes half of all the novels written by men. And the I fled but before I fled, I heard the writer say to his wife ‘honey you shouldn’t have done that.’ But the truth is that I shouldn’t have done that.

To read a novel is to give honor to art, why lie about giving honor to something to which you have not?  
I was of course absolutely mortified that day but I have come to respect what that writer’s wife had, a fantastic bullshit detector and now that I have the good fortune of being an established writer, one who does not like to miss an opportunity to wallow in praise by the way, I can sense when a person is saying empty words and it feels much worse than they had said nothing at all, so have a good bullshit detector. If you don’t have it now, work on it. But having that detector means that you must also use it on yourself. And sometimes the hardest truths are those we have to tell ourselves.  
When I started sending out my early writing to agents and publishers and started getting rejections, I convinced myself that my work had simply not found the right home, which might have been true. But there was another truth that took me much longer to consider, that the manuscript was not good. And in fact, the first novel I wrote or what I thought was a novel, eventually needed to be put away in a drawer and I’m so grateful that it was never published.

It is hard to tell ourselves the truth about our failures, our fragilities, our uncertainties, it is hard to tell ourselves that maybe we haven’t done the best that we can. It is hard to tell ourselves the truth of our emotions that maybe what we feel is hurt rather than anger, that maybe it’s time to close the chapter of a relationship and walk away. And yet when we do, we are the better off for it.

I understand that the Harvard College mission calls on you to be citizen leaders, I don’t even know what citizen leader means. It sorts of sounds like a Harvard Graduate saying I went to college in Boston, which by the way has to be the most immodest form of modesty. Please class of 2018 when you are asked where you went to college just say Harvard.

By the way I went to Yale for graduate school, not New Haven which has other universities, but we also know that in the grand snobbery sweepstakes of prestigious American colleges, grad school doesn’t really count, it’s undergrad that counts. So, it’s entirely possible I don’t even know how this works.

So, you’re charged to be citizen leaders which I suppose it means you’re charged to be leaders. I often wonder who will be led if everyone is supposed to be a leader. But whether you are the leader or whether you’re the led I urge you to always bend towards the truth, to err on the side of the truth.

And to help you do this, make literature your religion, which is to say read widely, read fiction and poetry and narrative nonfiction. Make the human story the center of your understanding of the world. Think of people as people, not as abstractions who have to conform to bloodless logic but as people, fragile, imperfect, with pride that can be wounded and hearts that can be touched.

Literature is my religion. I have learned from literature that we humans are flawed, all of us are flawed. But even while flawed, we are capable of enduring goodness, we do not need first to be perfect before we can do what is right and just.

And you Harvard class of 2018 are not unfamiliar with speaking the truth. When you stood alongside dinning-hall walkers during the strike, when you protested the end of DACA when, when you supported the Black Lives Matter movement, you were speaking the truth about the dignity that every single human being deserves. I applaud you. I urge you to continue.  
But remember outside the cocoon of Harvard, the consequences will be greater, the stakes will be higher, please don’t let that stop you from telling the truth. Sometimes especially in politicized spaces, telling the truth will be an act of courage, be courageous…

Speech 2

The Un-Instagramable Self”  
  
Northeastern Commencement Address 2019

Tara Westover

[LEARN MORE](https://tarawestover.com/commencement)

Hello and good morning. President Aoun, members of the board, faculty, staff, and of course, graduates: it’s an honor to be with you this morning to celebrate this milestone. This huge achievement. For you graduates, it’s a celebration of the last several years and all the work you put in. For your parents, it’s a celebration of work put in your whole lives. Maybe even before your lives. Let’s take a moment, and thank them for that.

First, I’d just like to say, that my being awarded this degree for a few minutes of public speaking in no way diminishes the many years of hard work that you had to put in to get yours.

Actually, I’ve never given a commencement speech before. In fact, this is the largest crowd I’ve ever spoken to, by about ten times. You can imagine, then, that I was a little tense about it. I’m not all that much older than you, ten years maybe, and this is a scary gig. So, what I did is, I looked up last year’s commencement speaker to see how I would measure up. I’m a published author, with a book on the New York Times list, so, you know, I thought would measure up pretty well.

Well…. Here is what I found. Last year’s speaker was an Emmy-nominated actor. Okay, that’s okay I thought. Then I kept reading. She is also a sprinter, who broke several world records. Wait for it. She is also a double-below-the-knee amputee (just wait, there’s more) who pioneered the technology for her own prosthesis. Which of course is now the international standard for prosthetics. It also casually mentioned that she’s a runway model and was recently inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

If I were going to tailor-make a nightmare act to follow, she would be it.

I, in contrast, am not a model. I’ve overcome no major surgeries, and I’ve developed no technology to help others. My athletic abilities are pitiable, but probably better than my acting skills. Still, here I am. And you’re stuck with me for the next 15 minutes.

So. Looking out at you all in your black caps and gowns, I’m reminded of my own graduation, which wasn’t that long ago. I was twenty-one years old. I remember that back then I was an avid Facebook user, and that like everyone, when the ceremony ended, I uploaded photos to my page. Specifically, I uploaded three photos. One of me, standing alone, in my cap and gown. Another of me with my mother, and a third of me with both my mother and father.

There was nothing unusual about the photos. In them we were smiling, or near enough to it. In them I was just another happy graduate full of promise, embracing my happy parents. But this was a fiction, and I knew it. In fact, it was because the photos were untrue, and not in spite of it, that I wanted them online. Because they showed my life as I wanted it to be, rather than as it was.

Here are four things that I remember about that day. Four things you can’t see in the photos, but that tell the real story.

Number one. That it was my first graduation ceremony. That unlike my classmates, I had neither a high-school diploma, nor a GED. I’d been raised in the mountains of Idaho by parents whose radicals’ beliefs meant that I had never been allowed to go to school. (I was sort of the equivalent of a kindergarten dropout.) It was a miracle that I’d made it to that university at all, let alone that I was leaving with a degree.

Number two. That although I was graduating from a Mormon university, I no longer believed in Mormonism. All of the previous year, I had struggled to hold on to the beliefs of my childhood—to the faith I shared with my parents as well as with every other person I cared about, every brother, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin. I was, at the moment I walked across the stage to get my diploma, still wondering what the loss of my faith would mean. Could I be a good person, even without my faith? It sounds strange now, but I really did think that without Mormonism, I might turn out to be an ass.

Number three. That I was alone. Although my parents are standing next to me in the picture, they had not been at the graduation ceremony. At least, I don’t think they were there. I had quarreled with my father some weeks before on some point of ideology, and he had declared that he wasn’t coming. That morning he had changed his mind, and he and my mother had raced down from Idaho, but they were too late. They missed the ceremony, and were, in fact, only present for the photo.

Number four. That my apartment was empty. I’d been up all of the previous night packing every item I owned either into boxes for storage or suitcases, which now sat packed by the door. I was leaving that night for the University of Cambridge in England, a country about which I knew very little.

Adding these four things together, I don’t believe there was any part of my life that I felt secure in, or proud of. The prospect of Cambridge terrified me. I’d grown up in a junkyard; I felt deeply that I didn’t belong in that place.

Faith was the rock I’d built my life on, and now that rock was turning to sand before my eyes.

My family was a tangle of love and radicalism and what I now suspect was mental illness. The love was real, but so were the other things, and I didn’t yet know how I was going to navigate them.

That was who I was, but that is not who I uploaded to Facebook. I uploaded a happy woman, a woman who was all joy and smiles. Who was “fun?” Even though I was terrified. Even though I spent most of that day just trying to get through it, and wishing it was over.

Something strange happened in the weeks and years that followed my graduation. Something bizarre. Which is that I came to think of my graduation photos as my graduation. I came to identify more with the woman in those pictures than I did with my actual self.

We humans have always struggled with two identities. There has always been a difference between who we are when we are with ourselves and who we are when we are with others. But now we have a third self: The virtual avatar we create and share with the world.

For most people, “sharing themselves” online means carefully curating an identity that exaggerates some qualities while repressing others that they consider to be undesirable. Online, no one has acne or dark circles or a temper; no one washes dishes, does laundry or scrubs toilets. Mostly, we brunch. And we take exotic, rarified vacations. We pet sea turtles. We throw ourselves from airplanes.

They are beautiful, unblemished lives. But sometimes I think that when we deny what is worst about ourselves, we also deny what is best. We repress our ignorance, and thus we deny our capacity to learn. We repress our faults, and thus we deny our capacity to change. We forget that it is our flawed human self, and not our avatar, who creates things and reconsiders and forgives and shows mercy.

But ultimately the real problem, as the writer Zadie Smith has pointed out, is that sharing a self is not the same thing as having a self. Your avatar isn’t real. It’s a projection. It’s not terribly far from a lie. And like all of the lies that we tell, the real danger isn’t that others will believe it but that we will come to believe it ourselves. That we will come to identify with our virtual self (who looks so beguiling in photographs, whose life is bright and free and literally filtered).

In this way we become alien to ourselves. Who is this person who spends so much time studying? Washing dishes? Taking care of grandma? This is not how I see myself.

I learned at my own graduation that over identifying with your idealized self is a deeply alienating experience. It is a form of self-rejection. Because what you are saying to yourself is: I’m not good enough the way I am.

So today, I would like to pause for a moment to appreciate the parts of you that you don’t put online. I would like to mount a defense of them. Of your boring, internal, book-reading, dishwashing, thought-having life. Of the parts of you that can’t be captured by any technological medium. It’s a concept that I’m going to call “the un-instagramable self.”

Here’s something I truly believe: everything of any significance that you will do in your life will be done by your un-instagramable self. It is, for example, your un-instagramable self who is graduating today. I say this with confidence because I’ve yet to see a Facebook or Instagram account which is dedicated to photos of someone studying or attending lectures or writing essays.

All of the most substantive experiences that you will have in your life will be had by the boorish slob you are trying to edit out of existence. The you who falls in love at your dingy entry-level job will not be the glamorous and airbrushed you who will appear in your wedding photos. And parenting will be *nothing* like you will represent it to be online. For one thing, there will a lot more actual shit than you will ever post on Instagram. There will be sleep deprivation and petty standoffs and moments of self-doubt. But the moments of love and tenderness and belonging will touch you more deeply than anything you will find in the virtual world.

You will look wonderful in the photos you will post of you and your children. You will look wonderful because you will make sure that you look wonderful, and you will delete the ones in which you look harassed and depleted because your five-year-old woke screaming from a nightmare at 3am. You will not look wonderful as you crouch on your hall floor in stretched-out pajamas and rock your child back to sleep. You will look like hell. But you will remember the weight of your son on your chest long after the perfectly staged portraits have faded from all relevance.

And in twenty-five or thirty years, when your daughter graduates from a university, and she is sitting where you are now, and some random commencement speaker tells her to thank her Mom and Dad, she will not be thinking of your avatar—of the carefully chosen cover photo that obscures the lines in your face and the grey in your hair. She will be thinking of *you*. Creased and sweaty, with thinning hair and warts and liver spots and whatever other signs of decay that you’ve got going on by then.

So. Class of 2019. March up here, and claim your degree, and give the camera your best smile. But tonight, as you upload that photograph, take a moment to check in with your un-instagramable self—and thank them for getting you this far, and for taking you the rest of the way.

Thank you.

Activity Two:

**Mike Pence's commencement speech invitation from Taylor University stirs controversy**

[**Tim Evans**](http://www.indystar.com/staff/8465/tim-evans/)**, Indianapolis Star**Published 10:58 a.m. ET May 1, 2019 | **Updated 12:21 p.m. ET May 1, 2019**

A Taylor University freshman and a recent grad share their perspectives on Mike Pence chosen to give commencement address.

UPLAND — The selection of Vice President Mike Pence to give the commencement address next month at [Taylor University](https://www.taylor.edu/) has created a rift among students, alumni and faculty at the typically low-key, non-denominational Christian college.

The controversy has elicited strong emotions on the private university's 952-acre campus at the edge of the small Grant County community of Upland, about 70 miles north of Indianapolis.

More than 12,750 people — many of them students, alumni and parents — have signed competing petitions at change.org. One asks the administration to rescind its invitation, the other supports the Pence visit.

The day of the announcement, the faculty voted 61-49 to approve a motion of dissent. The non-binding action expressed "to the board of trustees that the majority of faculty is in disagreement with the decision," [according to The Echo](http://theechonews.com/commencement-stirs-controversy/), Taylor's student newspaper.

The dispute also spurred a number of organized and impromptu conversations about religion and politics among many of the school's about 2,000 students, staff and administrators.

Fallout has spread far beyond the campus.

There's been national coverage from media outlets ranging from Fox News to The Washington Post, as well as stories and opinion pieces on numerous education- and faith-related websites.

On campus last week, about half the students asked by IndyStar about Pence's visit declined to comment. Most of those who did talk said they oppose the selection of the vice president to be the commencement speaker, but added they can see both sides of the issue.

They also said the level of controversy at the school has probably been overblown by the national media and outcry from parents, alumni, political insiders and pundits. But there's no question the move has stirred up feelings on the campus.

"Even just between people that don't really take a side on this issue, they're really disheartened and upset by how much conflict and division is on campus," observed freshman David Chinn.

"There's a lot of people working to try and reconcile the two sides with their disagreements. I think we're gradually getting there. Obviously, there's a lot of emotions and very, very strong opinions ... I think that we're gradually getting to a place of understanding, but we're obviously not there at the moment."

The varying emotions and opinions surfaced almost immediately after Taylor President Paul Lowell Haines announced April 11 that Pence would be the speaker at the school's May 18 commencement ceremony. Haines called it an honor to land the vice president and former governor.

"Mr. Pence has been a good friend to the University over many years, and is a Christian brother whose life and values have exemplified what we strive to instill in our graduates," Haines said in a statement announcing Pence as the speaker. "We welcome the Vice President and his wife, Karen Pence, to this 173-year-old premier institution of Christian higher education, and thank them for their love and service for our nation, our state, and our institution."

The backlash has not deterred the administration.

"Since making the announcement of Vice President Mike Pence’s upcoming commencement speech, we have received feedback from people on either side of the issue," James R. Garringer, the university's director of media relations, said in a statement to IndyStar.

"Taylor University is an intentional Christian community that strives to encourage positive, respectful and meaningful dialogue. We look forward to hosting the Vice President next month."

Pence will come to Taylor after delivering another commencement address May 11 at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Some critics of the selection explained they would not be opposed to Pence speaking at the school under different circumstances. And they stressed their concerns are not because he is a Christian.

What bothers some is way the invitation was handled by the administration, without input from students or faculty. To others, the selection feels like an endorsement of a specific political side and religious philosophy in divisive political times. Still others said they are troubled by Pence's affiliation and support of President Trump, who they don't believe represents the Christian values central to the university's mission.

Freshman Jared Smith acknowledged his concern is not just about Pence's politics or faith.

**Buy Photo**

**Jared Smith is a freshman at Taylor University.***(Photo: Jenna Watson/IndyStar)*

"I haven't seen any evidence that totally disqualifies him from being a reasonable speaker at Taylor — nothing that makes it appear that he is not practicing Christian values that would align with Taylor," Smith explained.

He said the announcement seemed to be a "poorly thought out decision." He said those he's spoken with wish there had been "more thoughtfulness and dialog" with students and faculty. Still, he said, the debate on campus has remained civil.

"Inside Taylor," Smith said, "people for the most part have been very reasonable in their discussions. There's a lot of different views, and a lot of different reasons people have for signing certain petitions and not others, or not signing any petition. But generally, people have been very calm and very reasonable."

Comments attached to the online petitions have been a little stronger.

The [petition opposing Pence's visit](https://www.change.org/p/taylor-university-president-paul-lowell-haines-protest-vice-president-mike-pence-at-taylor-university-commencement-ceremony?recruiter=951596827&utm_source=share_petition&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=psf_combo_share_initial&recruited_by_id=4db03280-5c76-11e9-b1eb-79afc2552f3f) was started by Alex Hoekstra, a Taylor alum. It had more than 7,060 signatures as of Monday afternoon.

"Inviting Vice President Pence to Taylor University and giving him a coveted platform for his political views makes our alumni, faculty, staff and current students complicit in the Trump-Pence Administration's policies, which we believe are not consistent with the Christian ethic of love we hold dear," the petition says.

Comments include:

* Grandmother of FOUR TU graduates. If you invite this bigot I’m through making tuition payments for the rest of the family.
* The politics and policies of VP Pence and President Trump are incongruous with the Christian values the university is sworn to uphold.
* As a Taylor alum, a scientist, and an American I am deeply disappointed and alarmed at Taylor's invitation to Pence. Please rescind his invitation. Not my Taylor. Not my Jesus.
* I’m the father of a 2017 graduate. Mike Pence is a hypocrite working in the Trump administration and has no business speaking on Taylor Campus. Refer to Jesus’ teachings on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in Matthew 23
* This man — Mike Pence — and this administration are as far removed from the teachings of Christ as one can get. The US deserves better, Indiana deserved better, & your students deserve better. Perhaps your Bible needs to be reread. Mine does not condone the actions of this administration and, in fact, speaks against many of them.

Taylor sophomore Sam Jones started [a competing petition](https://www.change.org/p/president-lowell-haines-support-vp-mike-pence-as-taylor-university-commencement-speaker) after Hoekstra's went live online. It is intended as a show of support for the selection of Pence. As of Monday afternoon, it had more than 5,700 signatures.

**Taylor University sophomore Sam Jones started a petition in support of having Vice President Mike Pence speak at graduation.***(Photo: Submitted by Sam Jones)*

"As students and active community members of Taylor University, we believe that the the University's decision to host VP Mike Pence as commencement speaker should be supported," the petition says. "By Pence speaking at this upcoming graduation, Taylor is by no means aligning themselves with the alleged controversial views of the Trump administration, they are simply giving a voice to all opinions and planes of thought."

The petition also includes dozens of strongly worded comments, including:

* Picking Pence is a good choice. Taylor should ignore the liberal influences in higher education and their emotion-laden tactics.
* No matter a office holder's political views, it would be an honor to have a sitting vice president speak the commencement
* VP Pence is a man of genuine integrity and anyone would be wise to listen to his wisdom
* I'm signing because the mindless "children" at this university don't to have a clue what being a Christian actually is. Perhaps they can drop their Hate level just one notch and try to figure that out. If not then it is confirmed that this school is only inhabited by FAKE Christians.. Raised by #PISSPOORPARENTS
* As a Christian school it is shameful that they do not want our Vice President of the United States to come into Taylor. As examples we need to show these young adults that they need to honor and respect who God puts in office.

Jones said he started the petition "to show administration that we didn't want them to rescind the invitation and we wanted to show support" for Pence coming to Taylor.

"I personally like the idea of him coming to speak because he's the vice president of the United States and, regardless of political affiliation, having somebody of that status be able to come to our small campus in the middle of Indiana is a pretty big honor," Jones  said.

"Regardless of whether it was Mike Pence or Joe Biden, I would very much appreciate having the vice president come to speak to us. Outside of that, I do believe that Mike Pence holds values that are very much in line with Taylor's values in terms of Christian faith and living out a glorifying life to the Christian faith."

It is Pence's particular take on Christianity that bothers some opposed to him speaking at

"I think one of the biggest errors in the political and religious conversation in America today is this idea that Christianity is one group of people with the same opinions or the same politics or the same life experiences," said Emily Russell, a 2018 Taylor graduate.

Pence represents one specific view of Christianity, Russell said.

"But that is not the only side of Christianity," she said. "And there are enough Christians who feel that his policies do not reflect their values, that they don't think that this is an appropriate speaker for a university that's trying to not only be Christian, but inviting to Christians with varying experiences and opinions."

This isn't the first time Pence's selection as a commencement speaker at an Indiana university has generated controversy. About 100 students walked out of the 2017 graduation ceremony at the University of Notre Dame as the vice president began his commencement address.

The graduation will be in the Kesler Student Activities Center arena on the Taylor campus. Tickets will be required and school officials say there will be ample tickets for all graduates and their guests.

Due to Pence's visit, additional security measures will be in place, including limits on travel to the campus and parking. School officials say there also will be metal detectors and restrictions on items that can be brought into the center.

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**Universities avoid politically controversial commencement speakers after student protests**

**Alex Morey, Opinion contributor**Published 6:00 a.m. ET June 29, 2018 | **Updated 9:12 a.m. ET June 29, 2018**

***Disinviting commencement speakers has become a phenomenon, a misguided way to rid campuses of unpopular ideas. But this year, it didn't happen and the reason it didn't is not a good one.***



*(Photo: David L. Ryan/The Boston Globe via AP)*

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Like the weather, commencement speaker controversies at America’s colleges and universities seem to heat up every spring, with [students seeking to silence](https://www.thefire.org/resources/disinvitation-database/) or “disinvite” a spectacular range of graduation speakers from [Donna Brazile](https://www.thefire.org/resources/disinvitation-database/#home/viewdisinvitationattemptdetails/55a54a35865eefae2121101d/) to the [Dalai Lama](https://www.thefire.org/resources/disinvitation-database/#home/viewdisinvitationattemptdetails/58e25e9f14c388482e709f40/), from [Madeleine Albright](https://www.thefire.org/resources/disinvitation-database/#home/viewdisinvitationattemptdetails/572a44ca146a919a2e11f29f/) to [Mr. Rogers](https://www.thefire.org/resources/disinvitation-database/#home/viewdisinvitationattemptdetails/55a4211ad3efe44455cc7149/). The phenomenon became so predictable, it got a name: disinvitation season.

While disinvitation season controversies emerge from diverse constituencies, many are rooted in a misguided notion that scrubbing campuses clean of unpopular ideas is a good idea. At the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](https://www.thefire.org/), we work to combat that belief — and all kinds of campus free speech violations in the process.

In 2017, speech-related campus incidents spiked and, in several high-profile cases, devolved into actual violence. Berkeley had a [full-scale riot](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/02/01/uc-berkeley-campus-protest-milo-yiannopoulos-breitbart/97378104/). An [angry mob at Middlebury College](https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2017/05/01/campus-protesters-free-speech-editorials-debates/100885962/) sent a professor to the hospital. So, against that backdrop of unprecedented unrest, what happened this disinvitation season was surprising.

This year, disinvitation season didn’t happen.

FIRE defines a disinvitation as any effort to prevent an invited speaker from being heard on campus, whether by asking administrators to cancel the appearance or by so materially disrupting the event that the speaker is prevented from speaking or the audience prevented from hearing.

Our [Disinvitation Database](https://www.thefire.org/resources/disinvitation-database/)tracks such attempts since 2000, when there were five commencement-related disinvitations; by 2013, that number had nearly quadrupled to 19. But then they began to dip. Last year, there were five. This spring,just one.

In 2014, FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff envisioned two paths to the [demise of disinvitation season](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-lukianoff/new-report-the-push-again_b_5417664.html). “The first would be if students were to be better educated in how to engage in constructive protest and disagreement,” he wrote. The second “would be that universities might grow increasingly leery of inviting speakers who might offend the most vocal part of their student body or their faculty.”

In 2014, FiveThirtyEight ran a [statistical analysis of commencement speakers](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-disappearance-of-conservative-commencement-speakers/) at U.S. News & World Report’s top 60 universities and liberal arts colleges during the previous two years and found conservative voices disappearing. FiveThirtyEight “couldn’t find a single clearly aligned Republican political figure who spoke at any of these schools." Politicians, it seems, create controversy. And conservative ones specifically engender more controversy with largely left-leaning student bodies.

FIRE’s analysis of more recent speaker data shows the anti-controversy trend has proliferated.

Conservative politicians are even more disfavored now at top schools, appearing primarily at military academies like [West Point](https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-disappearance-of-conservative-commencement-speakers/) that invite members of the current administration. But, in a new development, even liberal politicians are now on the outs. Fifteen of them [spoke in 2014](https://www.thefire.org/commencement-speaker-trends-2003-2018/); this year, only five.

[2018 graduates](https://www.thefire.org/commencement-speaker-trends-2003-2018/) heard instead from actors like Mindy Kaling (Dartmouth), tech giants like Facebook’s Sheryl Sandberg (MIT), humorist David Sedaris (Oberlin), as well as journalists, businesspeople, scientists and social justice advocates like Heather McGhee, who heads the progressive think tank Demos (Vassar).

And universities don’t seem to be teaching students that disinvitations aren't just ill-considered — they're ineffective. FIRE survey data on college students’ attitudes on free speech shows more than half of students agree that there are times when a university [should withdraw a speaker’s invitation](https://www.thefire.org/publications/student-surveys/student-attitudes-free-speech-survey/). Both right- and left-leaning students object to speakers with “racist” and “sexist” views. Liberal students would overwhelmingly disinvite “homophobic” speakers, while conservative students would disinvite “anti-American” ones. And while such requests may not sound unreasonable, these labels appear to be undergoing “[concept creep](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/04/concept-creep/477939/),” increasingly justifying disinvitation attempts by students of all ideological backgrounds.

Universities concede

For example, in 2014, International Monetary Fund Director Christine Lagarde (one of Forbes “[25 Most Powerful Women in the World](https://www.forbes.com/pictures/mkl45eimji/no-5-christine-lagarde-a/#4beec28536fc)” that year) [withdrew from her commencement](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/05/12/imf-lagarde-smith-commencement/9000527/) engagement at Smith College after students accused her of sexism for representing “a corrupt system that fuels the oppression and abuse of women worldwide.” That same year, [Brandeis University rescinded](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/05/17/commencement-disinvitation-season/9092303/) an invitation to women’s rights activist and female genital mutilation survivor, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, over her views on Islam and the treatment of women in Islamic societies.

When universities give into these demands or stand idly by as speakers withdraw, it signals students that protection from certain ideas is more important than critical engagement with diverse perspectives. It also teaches would-be censors that their illiberal tactics work.

The depressing logical endpoint of this allergy to disagreement has already been reached at the University of South Carolina, which completely controversy-proofed commencement by [scrapping outside speakers](https://www.free-times.com/blogs/one-voice-only-usc-president-will-address-graduates-from-now/article_eb915d88-e91f-591a-93cf-073d66873bf3.html) altogether. This, at a university where the school seal quotes Roman poet Ovid on humanity’s search for common ground through liberal arts education, and depicts the goddesses of liberty and wisdom arriving at mutual understanding, shaking hands instead of going to war.

“The university must be that special place,” Carolina's [website proclaims](https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/registrar/graduation/commencement_ceremonies/commencement_traditions/university_seal.php), “where students can together pursue truth and strengthen both character and intellect.” But not, apparently, at graduation.

As students prepare to tackle society’s toughest challenges, top colleges and universities must consider whether their own commencement message — that potentially controversial messages are not worth considering — is one they really want to send.

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**OPINION**

# Political Correctness and Its Real Enemies

**By Jim Sleeper**

* Sept. 3, 2016

NEW HAVEN — Last November, Scott C. Johnston, a 1982 Yale graduate, was attending a conference organized by the [William F. Buckley Jr. Program](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.buckleyprogram.com_&d=CwMFaQ&c=-dg2m7zWuuDZ0MUcV7Sdqw&r=nTkoE3YtEebE9f2jmjB7Zlw4RWz8yGc-2s6-FgpG8zw&m=RVAJB3NzDJVLsVquX7nSHNQMUQXu9WuI7KGbgjANTMU&s=E4oZkhinZkFdaDJNwhLbk84R6ooPy9DWS5ygFFpORmU&e=) at his alma mater when student protesters disrupted it. Soon after, he watched an online video of a black Yale student hurling imprecations at a professor who headed her residential college for failing “to create a place of comfort and home.”

Such protests have prompted Mr. Johnston and other alumni to cease funding what they see as coddled children and weak-kneed administrators. “I don’t think anything has damaged Yale’s brand quite like that” video, he [said](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/05/us/college-protests-alumni-donations.html?module=inline). “This is not your daddy’s liberalism.”

More than a brand, however, a college has a mission: to teach young people the arts and disciplines of open inquiry and expression. That mission has just been reaffirmed in a University of Chicago [letter](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/us/university-of-chicago-strikes-back-against-campus-political-correctness.html?module=inline) to incoming freshmen that rejects “trigger warnings” about discomfiting course material, “safe spaces” for the hypersensitive and cancellations of invitations to controversial speakers.

But it isn’t the protests per se that damaged open inquiry and expression, but the frenzied way they have been portrayed by the right. The video that so angered Mr. Johnston was shot by Greg Lukianoff, president of the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.thefire.org_&d=CwMFaQ&c=-dg2m7zWuuDZ0MUcV7Sdqw&r=nTkoE3YtEebE9f2jmjB7Zlw4RWz8yGc-2s6-FgpG8zw&m=RVAJB3NzDJVLsVquX7nSHNQMUQXu9WuI7KGbgjANTMU&s=gbKlP7n74sYm45m1ozg3jTiqgFZy-lqQR17klNyJvv8&e=), which the Daily Caller then [reposted](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__dailycaller.com_2015_11_09_meet-2Dthe-2Dprivileged-2Dyale-2Dstudent-2Dwho-2Dshrieked-2Dat-2Dher-2Dprofessor_&d=CwMFaQ&c=-dg2m7zWuuDZ0MUcV7Sdqw&r=nTkoE3YtEebE9f2jmjB7Zlw4RWz8yGc-2s6-FgpG8zw&m=RVAJB3NzDJVLsVquX7nSHNQMUQXu9WuI7KGbgjANTMU&s=7wDcE2diE3XOmN7No9b4bfr4r41xzAK3g17c5zZWSSE&e=) under a headline, “Meet the Privileged Yale Student Who Shrieked at Her Professor,” with photos of her and her parents’ suburban Connecticut home. ENT

What the video didn’t show were the hundreds of white students having their first frank conversations about race with minority classmates. A thousand students of all colors joined a vibrant campus “march of resilience” — I know, because I was on campus last fall. Another thousand convened in the chapel to hear classmates and professors speak from their deepest humanity, without malevolence or duplicity. Free speech and open inquiry are alive and well on campus.

But today’s conservative “free speech” campaign doesn’t want you to know that. What motivates it is not the defense of free speech, but an ideology that condemns “politically correct” activists and administrators and dubiously recommends “free markets” as the best guarantors of such rights. “Our colleges and universities, though lavishly funded and granted every perquisite which a dynamic capitalist economy can offer, have become factories for the manufacture of intellectual and moral conformity,” [thundered Roger Kimball](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=http-3A__www.buckleyprogram.com_-23-21Roger-2DKimballs-2DIntroduction-2Dof-2DGeorge-2DWill_c18lp_i8q6uar641&d=CwMFaQ&c=-dg2m7zWuuDZ0MUcV7Sdqw&r=nTkoE3YtEebE9f2jmjB7Zlw4RWz8yGc-2s6-FgpG8zw&m=RVAJB3NzDJVLsVquX7nSHNQMUQXu9WuI7KGbgjANTMU&s=KsvYC9xheVyNXpq3J6mWKLpNpE9PKUCCkhsZ9nx_c-o&e=), board chairman of Yale’s Buckley Program, at a black-tie dinner that the program sponsored last year in New York.

If anything, the real threat to free inquiry isn’t students, but that same market imperative that First Amendment defenders claim to hold dear. Most university leaders serve not politically correct pieties but pressures to satisfy student “customers” and to avoid negative publicity, liability and losses in “brand” or “market share” — terms that belong in corporate suites but appear, increasingly, in deans’ offices.

Such obfuscation is nothing new. In 1953, Buckley, whose book “God and Man at Yale” urged alumni to roll back professors’ godless socialism, helped found the Intercollegiate Studies Institute to train students to counter “liberal” betrayals of “our nation’s founding principles — limited government, individual liberty, personal responsibility, the rule of law, market economy.”

Today wealthy donors back groups like the Intercollegiate Studies Institute: the Bradley Foundation, the Scaife family foundations and the Koch brothers’ DonorsTrust ( for donors who don’t want to go public) that funnel money to, among others, the David Horowitz Freedom Center (whose “academic bill of rights” would monitor professors’ syllabuses for “balance”) and Campus Watch, which tracks comments on the Middle East.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which has won [more than $1 million](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Contributions_of_the_Bradley_Foundation) from the Bradley Foundation and half a million dollars from DonorsTrust, claims to be standing up for traditional liberal values. Its enemies are the campus Jacobins, who, it claims, are destroying the “marketplace of ideas” that alumni remember so fondly.

Conservatives used to remind us that what the Constitution protects in speech, civil society modulates; freedom requires self-restraint and respect for others, not the hurling of scare words. Yet now their selectively legalistic “free speech” strategy helps turn collegial contentions into rhetorical battlefields by hyping and even provoking progressive offenders.

The reason is that conservatives’ yearning for ordered liberty is being debased not by liberals but by the casino-like financing and predatory lending and marketing of a “dynamic capitalist economy.” Think of Donald J. Trump’s “free speech” rampages (with attacks just like the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education’s on “political correctness”), the Senate’s lockjaw against open hearings, and market-driven entertainment that encourages real violence. Shaming undergraduates who are upset by all this and assailing deans who must cope with them have a chilling effect on “no strings attached” alumni generosity like Mr. Johnston’s, which shielded free inquiry from donors with more mercenary and ideological agendas.

A college is a civil society on training wheels. Students, away from home and in an “adult” society for the first time, may try out defensive ethno-racial flag waving, religious and political dogmas, athletic and fraternal self-segregation, and premature career-ladder climbing. They may scare one another a little, but they also learn to stand up for themselves.

If collegiate civil societies are lurching into ditches as often now as the “free speech” campaign claims, that’s partly because the larger society is, too. Yes, some students are as intemperate as the Republican presidential nominee, and some deans accommodate them. Their behavior may not be your daddy’s liberalism, but what their outraged critics are selling isn’t his conservatism, either.

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***Correction:****Sept. 11, 2016*

*An opinion essay last Sunday incorrectly described the headline and details of a video of a protester at Yale. The video was posted online by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, but the headline and details about the student were posted by The Daily Caller.*

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