The New Kronstadt

An online magazine dedicated to exploring the connection between free speech and social progress through historical anecdotes and personal narratives written by members of the Haverford College community.

> *I suggest that you preach Truth and do Righteousness as you have been taught, whereinsoever that Teaching may commend itself to your Consciences and your Judgements. For your Consciences and your Judgements we have not sought to bind; and see you to it that no other Institution, no political Party, no social Circle, no Religious Organizations, no pet Ambitions put such chains on you as would tempt you to sacrifice one Iota of the Moral Freedom of your Consciences or the Intellectual Freedom of your Judgements.*
>
> *— Isaac Sharpless, 5th President of Haverford College*

What is *The New Kronstadt*?

The New Kronstadt was an online magazine **published from fall 2022 through fall 2024** which employed historical anecdotes and personal narratives to spark important conversations about freedom of expression at Haverford College, an institution with a pervasive culture of self-censorship. **This document archives the magazine's contents**, once published at www.newksonstadt.info, which is no longer in use**.**

Soliciting contributions from professors, students, alumni, staff, and others who experienced Haverford's chilled speech climate firsthand, *The New Kronstadt* sought to shed light on the importance of free expression to building community. By sharing Think Piece articles and Kronstadt Moment stories from a diverse range of individuals, it aimed to inspire dialogue and encourage a more open and inclusive expressive environment at Haverford College and demonstrate how free speech goes hand-in-hand with social progress.

Why Haverford College?

Free speech, particularly on college campuses, is commonly but incorrectly understood to be a conservative issue. Nothing could be less true. Haverford College, where speech codes abound but conservatives are hard to find, proves the point. According to data from College Pulse, in the year that *The New Kronstadt* launched, Haverford College had 13.4 liberal students for every 1 conservative student. Despite the political homogeneity of the campus, 55% of Haverford College students said they self-censored on campus at least once a month and 70% of Haverford College students reported anxiety over having their words misunderstood — even in the classroom. As a case study, Haverford College demonstrates that free speech on campus isn't merely a

conservative issue. In fact, the numbers suggest that a majority of left-wing students at Haverford College self-censor due to the repressive ideological atmosphere on campus.

The New Kronstadt was created by William Harris in 2022, then a student at Haverford College and now an alumnus. The website began as a semester-long project sponsored by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) through its Campus Scholars program in the fall of 2022, and then it evolved into an ongoing publication until it ceased operations in fall 2024. The goal of *The New Kronstadt* was to remind community members at Haverford College and beyond that free speech has a progressive history, particularly on college campuses. The hope was that if a place like Haverford College could recover its own long-lost legacy of fostering free speech in the name of social progress, then other communities would follow.

The New Kronstadt took its name from the Kronstadt Rebellion, a historic event in which leftist sailors in the early Soviet Union demanded freedom of speech, press, and association. The rebellion was brutally suppressed by the Bolshevik government, highlighting the dangers of political uniformity as imposed by some leftists onto others. *The New Kronstadt* sought to bring attention to this important history, which shows that censorship is a tool of the powerful, and that speech is the power of the powerless.

The Kronstadt Rebellion has inspired left-wing thought in the past, with many intellectuals sharing their own "Kronstadt moments" in the 1950s to explain the moment at which they decided to renounce communism in favor of civil liberties, democracy, and human rights. In its manifesto, *The New Kronstadt* proclaimed that America needs a new generation to share their experiences of an intolerant left and reject the belief that the ends justify the means. After all, true social progress does not involve past inquisitions and purges. *The New Kronstadt* pushed for a renewed commitment to liberal democratic values on the American left. It did so by promoting more inclusive and open expressive environments, beginning with the community that its contributors were all a part of at Haverford College.

Why personal narratives?

The New Kronstadt was an online magazine that presented personal narratives, or "Kronstadt moments," in a format similar to Richard Crossman's *The God That Failed,* which catalogued the "Kronstadt moments" of six prominent left-wing intellectuals in the 1950s during the Cold War. These narratives explore the role that civil liberties, democracy, and human rights play in fostering positive societal change and challenge the notion that free speech is only a conservative issue.

Many Haverford College students, despite recognizing the vital role free speech has played in social movements such as women's suffrage, civil rights, immigrant advocacy, and gay liberation, still supported restrictive speech codes when *The New Kronstadt* was launched. *The New Kronstadt* aimed to connect social justice and free speech, which are not mutually-exclusive, and to share Kronstadt Moment stories from members of the Haverford College community committed to both such values.

Initially attracted to Haverford College for its emphasis on ethical and moral leadership and values of trust, concern, and respect, *The New Kronstadt*'s contributors challenged the school's culture of self-imposed censorship. The website, www.newkronstadt.info, aimed to reach those who had doubts about perpetuating a culture of self-censorship by remaining silent and encouraged Haverford community members and others to stand against censorship and commit to building a free speech culture by practicing open expression in their own lives.

Suggested Readings

Take a look at some of the writings which inspired the launch of The New Kronstadt and learn more about the historic importance of free speech.

Truth Seeking, Democracy, and Freedom of Thought and Expression — A Statement by Robert P. George and Cornel West

Cornel West taught at Haverford as a visiting professor in the late 1970s/early 1980s; the College awarded him an honorary degree in 1994; and he has been a guest speaker at Haverford many times.

The God That Failed

Richard Crossman's 1950s anthology launched the first formal volley in the Cold War from the political left. Its detailed personal essays describe the “Kronstadt moments” experienced by Louis Fischer, André Gide, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender, and Richard Wright — all of whom renounced communism due to serious civil liberties concerns. Crossman’s compilation was tremendously influential, and shaped a generation of left-wing thought. Traces of the volume’s influence can be found in the creation of Dissent Magazine and the academic writing produced by the New York Intellectuals.

The Power of the Powerless

Václav Havel's expansive political essay on freedom and power in the context of Soviet occupation has had a lasting impact on dissident movements both in and outside Eastern Europe. Section III is most applicable to such varied contexts as our own, and its lessons can be extrapolated beyond the specific geopolitical circumstance which explains its origins.

“Do Not Be Ashamed”

This poem by Wendell Berry speaks to the importance of refusing to be shamed into accepting others' dogma.

NCAC Talks to the Man Behind Pico v. Board of Education

Steven Pico '81 is an alumnus of Haverford College; while a student, he served as the lead plaintiff in the Supreme Court book-banning case Island Trees School District v. Pico; after graduation, he worked for the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC).

Emma Goldman and Free Speech

Emma Goldman's "Kronstadt moment" was the 1920s Kronstadt Rebellion itself. Her free speech advocacy was as well-known as her anarchist socialism, and the University of California, Berkeley has put together a collection of her writings on the topic.

The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action

Audre Lorde writes on the importance of speech and dialogue, placing particular emphasis on the intersectionality of free expression. The essay reflects themes from Lorde's poem A Litany For Survival, where she writes: "when we speak we are afraid / our words will not be heard / nor welcomed / but when we are silent / we are still afraid / so it is better to speak."

Free Speech & the Modern Campus

Camille Paglia inveighs against politically correct campus speech codes from a dissident left-wing perspective, offering a contrarian brand of social analysis inspired by the counterculture of the 1960s.

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The Unraveling of Campus Discourse: Haverford's Fall 2020 Student Strike

— A “*Kronstadt Moment*” story by Jacob Gaba

You’ve probably heard of students pulling fire alarms to prevent controversial speakers from giving a talk. You’ve probably also heard of students getting professors fired for “microaggressions,” or small remarks that unintentionally hurt a student’s feelings or appear to be slightly insensitive.

When I started at Haverford College in Haverford, Pennsylvania in the fall of 2018, all of these issues seemed distant. The environment was friendly, welcoming, and somewhat quirky. I knew that many students, like myself, came from at least somewhat liberal families and high schools. There were also some students, both on the political left and the political right, who sympathized with things that I disagreed with — but so what, that is the essence of college. I found a home on the cross country and track team, where I made lifelong friends. I became a history major, where I was pushed by my professors to produce quality research and writing.

While the latter two aspects of my college experience remained largely unchanged — and in fact provided me with a solid backbone against what became a somewhat rocky tenure at Haverford overall — the issues which seemed distant to me at first came to the fore in the fall of 2020.

On October 26, 2020, Walter Wallace Jr. was tragically shot and killed by police in nearby Philadelphia. Students, including myself, were outraged and upset. Frustrated by an admittedly poorly written email by the school's president, Wendy Raymond, a small group of students decided that the best course of action would be to go on "strike," crippling our college for an indefinite period of time by urging students to stop attending classes and activities.

The so-called strike began without any articulated demands. It kicked off with a rally to protest racial injustice. Though the rally was vague, the general idea of protesting racism was and still is something I fully support. However, very real frustrations with racism in America grew into somewhat misguided frustrations with our college, which the strike deemed to be irredeemably racist — a fact which strike organizers claimed was not up for debate.

Those who did not attend the rally were labeled racists (even if they could not make the event because of predetermined conflicts) and ostracized in some of their groups. For example, the captains of one varsity sports team were stripped of their leadership positions for not being supportive enough in the initial stages of the strike. Social media posting signified support for the strike, and those who did not post in favor of it were questioned. Perhaps worst of all, those who attended class — including myself (I had one class where I was the only student to show up) — were singled out for allegedly upholding structures of white supremacy. The racism that the strikers felt was inherent to Haverford had yet to be clearly defined.

When the organizers finally released their demands, the list carried some items that made sense (like canceling class on election day) but put forth many more that can only be classified as completely unserious. Most of the demand list focused on immunity for the strikers, even requesting pay for the time some might miss at work. Historically, strikes are conducted by labor unions that use collective power to gain benefits or better working conditions from an employer which cannot function without their work — my peers failed to recognize that fundamentally, we are consumers, not workers. We pay

the college up to tens of thousands of dollars each year to attend class. We already paid for that semester, so student bargaining power was actually very low. “Disrupting the order,” the strike’s professed goal, actually did little to gain the audience of administrators who were already more than sympathetic to the general idea of fighting racism.

Here are some examples of specific demands. Demand III required the college to be more “lenient” in the classroom toward “black and brown students” because of the “trauma” they face on a daily basis at Haverford. It is not my business to determine who experiences trauma. Yet the fact that the strike organizers demanded that all students of color be held to a lesser academic standard struck me as much more racist than anything the college could have possibly been doing at the time to prevent students of color from succeeding in the classroom and beyond.

Demand XII required that Haverford “terminate all relationships with the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD), and actively work toward police and prison abolition.” Haverford does not have a formal relationship with the PPD and has no mechanism for taking an active role in prison and policing politics.

The letter sent to the administration alongside the demands also requested the recognition of Haverford’s role in the forcible displacement of Native Americans from the area. Yes, a horrible act indeed, but one that occurred more than a century before the college existed. The blatant disregard for the facts here (protesting the college for an atrocious act which was in fact committed by other actors long before the college even existed) was then protected by the most dangerous part of the strike: its formal condemnation of dissent and active bullying of those who chose to think outside of the mob or constructively criticize its approach from within the broader movement for racial justice.

In some world, one might be able to make a reasonable argument for some, if not all, of the strikers’ demands. Perhaps put to the test of debate within the community, the best ideas from the strike might rise to the top, and the community might be able to come together and improve. Yet the demands were dictated by a small group of people at the top with little input from the community. They forced a new and radical orthodoxy on a student body that either had to accept it or face ostracization. A group of friends and I challenged the lack of open discussion during the strike by writing an open letter to the

community, citing specific claims by the strike organizers that there was no room for debate or disagreement on the issue. The school's main publication, The Clerk, refused to publish our letter, further proving our point. Eventually, the letter was published online, with much reluctance, in another student paper called The Bi-College News. Here is some of our letter (which you can view in its entirety here):

> *At this critical moment in our community's and our country's history, we have an obligation to see through changes that we, as individuals, see fit for the moment. While we will never all agree on the best way to improve our community, we can agree that the route to the best solutions will always involve spirited debate and thoughtful discourse. We are disappointed that neither has occurred in the midst of this strike, and we are concerned that the mutual trust necessary for meaningful change is being lost.*
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> *The organizers of the strike actively subdue any sort of criticism of their movement. They have largely done so by stating that "you either support the liberation of Black people and Indigenous people, or POC, or you do not" (HC Strike FAQ). They have also said in the FAQ that "ignorance" is the cause of any disagreement with the strike and that those who disagree have a "lack of social consciousness." They write that disagreement is "malicious" and "harmful."*
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> *To say that, to support BIPOC students, one must support this specific strike for this specific set of demands, denies the legitimacy of individual moral decisions. By saying that only ignorance or racism could lead anyone to disagree, the organizers ask those who question the strike's efficacy to either accept ostracism on campus or to discard their own moral judgments. There is no room for critical inquiry when only one answer is acceptable; there is also no way to correct errors in a movement that sees all criticism as illegitimate.*

Importantly, our letter focused not on whether racism existed at Haverford or in our country. Rather, it focused on the ability of students to think critically about such issues. The responses to our letter gravitated ad hominem, focusing on our intellect or our ability to attend Haverford (one student claimed that somebody must have taken the SAT for me to get in). Nobody challenged us on the substance. For example, one comment on the letter includes a simple "this opinion piece is trash." Another accuses us of "playing the victim." Asking for a college to hold normal classes and function as an

institution of education is, of course, not self-victimization — it is merely asking for the bare minimum from an organization of higher learning.

Perhaps the strike was the natural response to months of a locked-down campus, very real stress surrounding high-profile police killings around the country, and a tense national presidential election. I possess no ill-will toward any of my classmates who participated in the strike. I cannot fault people for becoming swept up in passion at a time of intense stress.

Where I can find fault is in the Haverford administration's response to the strike. Instead of trying to get us back into the classroom or accommodating dissenting voices, Haverford's leadership placated the mob and effectively silenced students who disagreed with the strike. Many professors even voluntarily canceled classes, precluding non-strikers from receiving educational instruction. I became worried, and wrote to Provost Linda Strong-Leek on November 4, 2020, entering the final week of the strike:

> *All of my classes have been canceled for this week, and more seem to be canceled for next week. How will I gain credit for the semester? Will I be able to complete my course work and get a grade? Will any of these things be meaningful if Haverford loses accreditation because of classes being indefinitely canceled?*
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> *Again, I ask these questions out of genuine concern—for myself, for my friends, and for many others who have reached out to me because they feel as though they are being denied the education they came here for. Many of those people are afraid to speak out for fear of being ostracized.*
>
> *I understand the need to cancel classes in the short term to alleviate the tension and pain being felt right now. But at what cost to our most powerful tool for making change in the world: our education?*
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> *The faculty seem more interested in placating the students striking than in actually teaching. Students are conversely bullying faculty into canceling class—I myself have been asked to sign such messages.*

I was assured that “there is no need for alarm. Many faculty are providing and may provide alternative plans for meeting course expectations. Please reach out to your individual professors for the plans if they’ve not made those plans available.” What the provost mentions here is the list of “teach-in” sessions developed by some professors and students to get around the accreditation issue. These sessions were not related to our actual classes whatsoever, nor were they opportunities for discussion about the strike. They were nuggets of indoctrination dressed up as “anti-racism education” to make professors and students feel better about missing an indefinite amount of class. Many of my professors did not even offer these sessions. I was told by the provost that the administration was “working mightily to resolve the issue.” Over two weeks had gone by, and the administration continued to obfuscate instead of act. By this point, the level of condescension expressed in the provost’s reply to me was unsurprising. One more week would pass until the strike fizzled out. Many friendships were ruined. The community needed to heal.

One year later, on October 26, 2021, Haverford President Wendy Raymond sent an email to the entire community celebrating the one-year anniversary of the strike. She made no attempt to bring the community together. Instead, she wrote that “this important and impactful event promoted awareness and prompted essential and overdue change in the way the College achieves racial equity in the community.” She does not name the material successes of the strike because, well, there were none. Material successes, like the planned renovation of the Black Cultural Center (which I unequivocally support), were in the works before the strike and were also certainly possible without missing three weeks of class — especially given President Raymond’s support for the strike. She did not recognize the widespread social division created by the divisive rhetoric of the strike, nor the blatant bullying and harassment of students and faculty who did not go along to get along. One student even had to be placed in alternative housing on the college’s dime after facing threats to his physical safety for speaking out against the strike — threats made by a professor, no less.

Yet, despite the lack of material success, President Raymond can pat herself on the back for fostering three weeks of "awareness-raising" for issues of race on campus that remain ill-defined. Since the strike, she continuously touts her “anti-racism” bona-fides, proving to the world that she is a “good” white person. Her agenda remains vague.

In the wake of the strike, Haverford hosted the scholar Ibram X. Kendi for a talk about his book How to be an Antiracist, which actually could have been an interesting conversation. Instead, on President Raymond's watch, questions were not allowed to be asked by the greater community. As the book suggests, and as the strike adopted, dissent is dangerous to the movement and should not be tolerated. Any college that follows this mantra is in danger of losing sight of a central tenet of education: the ability for students to think critically about the world.

Without nuanced discussion and debate, and without robust academic freedom, little learning can be accomplished. Our institutions become bastions for indoctrination. As Hannah Arendt wrote, there is a:

> *decisive incompatibility between the rule of a unanimously held 'public opinion' and freedom of opinion, for the truth of the matter is that no formation of opinion is ever possible where all opinions have become the same. Since no one is capable of forming his own opinion without the benefit of a multitude of opinions held by others, the rule of public opinion endangers even the opinion of those few who may have the strength not to share it.*

True change is needed in many spheres of our country. Yet Haverford's version of fighting racism — deriving from the strike's (and Kendi's) professed rejection of dissenting views — kills all true opinions. It fosters an illiberal environment in which students are not left to think for themselves. Sadly, with this approach, those who have historically suffered the most at the hands of racism in this country stand to lose the most, for the development of dogma that occurs in the vacuum of dissent is far from useful to solving the tangible problems we face. After all, it was unchallenged, centrally-imposed policy that partially caused the Soviet economy to collapse. If we reach the point at which students are discouraged from thinking for themselves and speaking their minds accordingly, then we have lost any and all value in the concept of liberal arts education.

— Jacob Gaba '22, for The New Kronstadt (Oct 20, 2022)

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False Omnipotence: Some Thoughts on Haverford, Free Speech, and Uncertainty

A “Kronstadt Moment” story by Nicholas Lasinsky

It is easy to characterize speech as arrogance; on the Haverford College campus, this is a common accusation. “How can you weaponize privilege with your words?” “Your speech uses power to marginalize others.” “Your words are traumatic; they must be stopped in the name of safety.” These are the usual refrains. They suggest that the unpopular speaker is transgressing a boundary; asserting themselves when they have no place to share their views; forcefully ripping rights, safety, and security away from vulnerable people; or causing harm simply by voicing a thought. And if we possessed omnipotent knowledge of the workings of the universe, to the extent that we genuinely had the truth pinned down, carefully cornered and tamed into a single canonical dogma — then these refrains would be right! To suggest that principles which are so clearly true may be false would be blatantly harmful, and idiotically arrogant.

But we are not gods. And nobody has all of the answers.

I come from a very rural area. It's an economically depressed piece of Pennsylvania, where people have turned to conservatism for salvation. Almost every member of my immediate family enthusiastically supported Donald Trump; a strong majority of my neighbors, classmates, teachers, and coworkers did likewise. In class, in church, at Thanksgiving — I grew up as the sole dissenter. I despise Trump and the Republican party, and my rebuttals stood in direct contradiction of my area’s values. But my community members let me have my say. They didn’t agree with me, didn’t relish my words — they often worked to refute my points. But they did not silence me. And despite our many disagreements, I always respected them for that. There was a sense, at home, that there was something to be gained through discussion. I cannot say with certainty whether I have genuinely changed my parents’ minds on crucial issues — but I do know that my own perspective was deeply shaped by what I heard.

Haverford was supposed to be a fresh ideological start, my salvation after a long sojourn in the desert; a blue tide of peers who agreed with my deepest beliefs. And in many ways, the school has fulfilled that promise. Students are overwhelmingly caring and conscientious. Community members are thoughtful, and they try to do good in the world. People put their money where their mouths are — and I respect that. Haverfordians walk the walk as much as they talk the talk.

But here's the rub: Haverford talks just one talk. My freshman self didn't understand that there could be different shades of blue, and that Haverford prides itself as one of the deepest. I myself am a proud moderate, and as a result I disagree with a number of positions held in universal regard at my school. I don't believe in defunding the police. I support a ban on abortion after twelve weeks. I think that the abolition of prisons is an impossible goal. I am skeptical of affirmative action. I feel that liberal circles have left boys and men — not to mention rural America — behind. I grate against the incessant references to identity in every missive of the college.

These opinions are enough to get me branded as dangerous by many members of my community — and indeed, I don't voice them often, for fear of losing another friend. Tensions peaked during the 2021 student strike. I've said my piece on that incident already, and Jacob Gaba has done an excellent job of working through its ramifications for this project.

The most relevant piece of my experience of the strike to this article is the fact that I was removed from Students' Council during this meeting for defending my decision to speak out against it. Throughout the meeting, I kept a cool demeanor, unwilling to get angry — but the mere act of defense was enough to label me the sort of person who causes harm to others.

Indeed, while the strike has passed, its dynamics live on. Perhaps if someone was willing to engage in honest and generous discussion with me, they would learn that I think that criminal justice reform is essential; that I feel genuinely unsure about the ethics of abortion; that I believe identity politics alienate the voters we most need to make genuine change in this country.

But the Haverford community has decided that on a number of issues, only a single view is acceptable. From the vantage point of discourse, this environment is stultifying;

every statement must be evaluated, every thought screened and filtered before it can be carefully expressed, lest it prove transgressive.

This is not a healthy environment for intellectual growth; on Haverford's campus, beliefs are never changed, only reinforced.

And if anyone dares to question this collective doctrine, the consequence is not vigorous disagreement, but silence, alienation, and disgust. While Haverford's Honor Code codifies this rejection, its power lies primarily in the ability of one's peers to exert social isolation on anyone who does not toe the line. The Honor's Code treatment of speech is worth an article in and of itself, but suffice it to say that the document is not friendly to freedom of speech. The effect is vicious; like a zealous congregation, the group purges itself of nonbelievers. I'm not the first to compare cancel culture to Puritan oppression, but the analogy is appropriate — for the more one is alienated, the further they drift, and the greater an opportunity there is for resentment to grow. To be exiled from the crowd also pushes potential allies to the other side, and — counterintuitively — weakens the instigators of exile. As Ryan Grim notes in his excellent unpacking of progressive meltdowns at high-profile nonprofits and advocacy groups:

> *Winning power requires working in coalition with people who, by definition, do not agree with you on everything; otherwise they'd be a part of your organization and not a separate organization working with you in coalition. Winning power requires unity in the face of a greater opposition, which runs counter to a desire to live a just life in every moment.*

Indeed, Haverford students have made much the same point before, noting that "the act of silencing other voices and making ad hominem attacks is counterproductive because it severely detracts from our collective power."

If you adopt the collective beliefs of the school community, and blindly and wholeheartedly ratify its prepackaged opinions, then this culture is a blessing. It is a mesh of constant support, a comforting reinforcement; who doesn't enjoy constant affirmation in class, on the field, and in their inbox? But comfort for ourselves is not the same as addressing pressing issues for others. The greatest injustices will always

require difficult conversations, productive disagreement, and working across lines of difference.

Free speech is not about constant affirmation. It is instead founded upon humility: recognizing that we must question our own certainties to reach the truth.

The doctrine of Haverford is not universally accepted, no matter how many times its adherents assert otherwise. The world is fundamentally uncertain, and filled with knowledgeable, thoughtful people who disagree; to assume that one's set of beliefs is indomitably correct is to seal oneself off from growth, change, and the inexorable march to truth. I am a stubborn person; the bar to change my opinions is high. But the only way I can hope to improve is by listening to what others have to say, debating them at times, digesting their thoughts, altering and tinkering with my own beliefs, and slowly, steadily shifting.

Crushing free speech, on Haverford's campus or in any context, seals us off from this evolution, for it assumes that one doctrine is unshakably valid — that our assumptions are so indisputably correct that questioning them is an insult. But we are not gods; we cannot assume that our beliefs are forever fixed, that they are so immovable that it is not worth even hearing out the position of one who disagrees in good faith.

Arrogance does not lie with the speaker who dares to cross doctrine, but with those who believe that they have figured the world out to the extent that opposing discourse holds no value — to the extent that no other belief is even worth placing on the table. There is an arrogance in that certainty, a close-mindedness to difference, and an unwillingness to confront the simple fact that you may be wrong.

The world is better when we embrace the humility of uncertainty — when we are willing to listen to others, debate them, work to understand them — no matter how immovable our current beliefs feel. This is a fundamental step in any journey to understanding a topic, and a fundamental step of education. One cannot grow intellectually without confronting disagreement and the pain it may bring. Striving for the truth, altering one's opinions, listening to beliefs that one finds unsavory — these are not pleasant experiences. But they are necessary steps on the path to intellectual growth.

Curl up into the safety of orthodoxy, and you will feel vindicated, reinforced, and smugly comfortable in your mesh of preordained beliefs. But know that any doctrine's mesh is

also a web that traps you from moving forwards. It is my sincere hope that this project and others like it will foster healthy discourse on campuses across the country, for without that, we are doomed to fall into the stagnant pool of common opinions, cradled by comfortable certainty — and deluded by our own false omnipotence.

— Nicholas Lasinsky '23, for The New Kronstadt (Nov 26, 2022)

My Disillusionment in Haverford: Attacks on Expression and Public Dissent

A "Kronstadt Moment" story by Trevor Stern

My disillusionment in Haverford was not a sudden and uniform event, but happened in stages. When I first arrived at the school, the Honor Code was one of the reasons I was most excited to join the community. In it, I saw the potential of a community which valued all of its members, each of whom brought their own life experiences. This meant being comfortable with difference and disagreement, and acknowledging this as a strength of our community.

As someone who grew up living in different countries around the world, this kind of comfort with diversity and difference was something I wanted in the place I would call home for the next four years. In high school, I attended an international school while living in New Delhi, India. While there, I was deeply affected by the poverty I saw on a daily basis. I remember seeing a man with leprosy (a curable disease) forced to pull himself around a market on a skateboard begging, as his limbs were slowly being eaten away. I saw children who had been sold into slavery begging from the city's underpasses. Faced with such tragic circumstances, I felt compelled to do something to break the cycle of poverty in which so many in the country found themselves. I began volunteering as an English teacher for kids from a local slum across the street from my school. With these skills, I hoped many of them would be able to attend college (which is conducted in English in India) and build a better life for themselves. Many of my students became my friends, and I felt quite invested in their future success. When I returned to the United States, I wanted to remain involved with helping them, so I started a fundraiser and was able to give 20 one year college scholarships to my students.

If there was one thing these experiences taught me, it was the importance of seeing the world beyond my own perspective. People came from so many different backgrounds, and this naturally led to countless different interpretations of the world around us. I saw that these perspectives were worthy of real consideration and engagement, even if they differed from my own worldview. This realization eventually formed the basis of my

Common Application essay, in which I wrote about my volunteer work and the ways in which it opened my eyes to the multiple ways in which people experienced the world. In Haverford and its Honor Code, I saw a community which valued and nurtured these differences of perspective, where people shared trust, concern, and respect for each other not in spite of, but because of our unique worldviews as informed by our lived experience. This played a large role in drawing me to the school, and eventually led me to accept my offer of admission.

However, early on in my first year, it became clear to me that many in our community did not interpret the school's values of trust, concern, and respect in the same way as me. For them, these values meant conforming your beliefs and principles to a specific template, and aggressively pursuing anyone who did not do the same. I did my best to ignore this dynamic, but the student strike on campus in the fall of my junior year made this attitude so visible, widespread, and harmful that I felt the need to speak up. After this, the toxicity directed at me on campus for speaking out became practically unbearable. It was only at this point that I fully realized the extent to which Haverford's administration and students had fully abandoned any commitment to decency, or belief in the importance of free expression in a liberal society. But I am getting ahead of myself. Hopefully, this article will in some way capture my experiences over my four years at Haverford, and the ways in which it institutionally failed to live up to the values which originally drew me to the school.

During customs week at Haverford (a unique, largely student-led orientation program), the first-year class makes a visit to the Quaker meeting house across College Avenue. I still remember the room buzzing with excitement as my customs group squeezed into the pews. It was explained to us that we should rise and speak as we were moved to do so, and could talk about any topic we chose. Although feeling trepidation, I rose part way through the meeting, introducing myself to all of the people who were to be my classmates. I spoke about the Honor Code, and the way in which it created a community that valued respect for one another above all else. I was excited to join a group with these values, and it felt completely natural to share this joy with others. Little did I know, this would be one of the last moments that I would feel able to openly express my thoughts to my peers as a collective group. Before long, it became clear to me that "trust concern and respect" were little more than a facade, covering the ugly

truth of an environment rife with harassment, bullying, and an illiberal disrespect for diversity of opinion and fundamental principles of free speech.

Signs of this atmosphere cropped up early in my time at Haverford. In particular, my customs group (a small group of students which doubles as both your orientation group and dorm-mates during your first year at Haverford) quickly developed into a place where I did not feel comfortable expressing myself. One day in the common room, two friends and I were discussing American immigration policy when our UCA (on-hall Upperclassman Advisor) casually walked in and chastised us for being “three white men” having this discussion. That two of us were Jewish and had ancestors who had come to America as refugees to escape pogroms and the Holocaust, while the third was actually from an ethnic minority group and had immigrant parents, did not seem to concern him during this moment of righteous indignation. Not long after, I heard the co-head of Honor Council, who was close friends with my UCA, telling him that “Trump supporters should have their wrists slit and bleed out until they die.” Although I personally abhorred the Trump administration, I also could not fathom holding such violent and intolerant views against those who disagreed with me. That this sentiment came from the head of the Honor Council, the body which governed social interactions on campus and could dole out disciplinary actions, only made me more concerned.

Things on my hall came to a head one night about a week or two into school. Most of us were sitting in the common room having various conversations. We were talking about our favorite books as kids, and someone mentioned James and the Giant Peach by Roald Dahl. Then someone else said they thought the book was racist. I responded that I didn’t remember seeing anything racist in the book when I read it. A member of the customs team immediately interjected, saying angrily to me, “Well, maybe that’s because you’re white!” I was shocked that she had said this and initially stayed quiet. But one of my friends on my hall spoke up, saying that she should not have tried to invalidate my opinion by evoking my race. After a couple of minutes, I agreed, and said that I thought the best way to handle the situation would have been to have told me what she found racist about the book, rather than telling me that I simply could not understand due to my race. I then tried to allow her to engage in a conversation with me, asking what specific things she found racist in the book. It quickly became clear that she had never read it, and had tried to invalidate my opinion because of a sense of righteous indignation rather than any substantive disagreement. She went after me and

my friend, accusing us of tone policing and gaslighting her by trying to silence her. I stressed that this was not my intention, and I wanted to actually engage in a thoughtful conversation about the book in question. But this was obviously not her goal. Over the course of the conversation, she got visibly more agitated as we refused to simply agree with her that I had no right to voice my opinion on the matter as a white man. Everyone in the room, save my friend and I, shifted to one side of the room, and it gradually felt more and more like a confrontation. At the end of the discussion, my friend left the dorm and went on a five hour walk past Villanova, only coming back at around four the next morning. He told me that he had learned that he never wanted to discuss matters like this again, and I couldn't blame him. The upperclassmen responsible for orienting us to campus life had succeeded in making the environment so toxic so as to not only discourage any future dissent, but the fundamental sharing of opinions, even those that most would not consider to be controversial.

In the days after this incident, many people who I had been friends with on my hall drifted away from me. I felt uncomfortable being in the same place as most of them, or even of speaking too loudly with friends about anything which might prompt a similar incident to happen again. This atmosphere took a huge toll on my mental and physical health. I no longer felt comfortable or welcome where I lived, and this quickly made my life on the hall untenable. I developed a chronic cough, which became so intense that I began having fits in which I projectile vomited almost every day. Scans done of my lungs showed no discernible cause for my unusual malady. That it almost exclusively happened while I was in my dorm, a place where I no longer felt free, only occurred to me later. After winter break, I felt that I had to leave this stifling atmosphere or I would not make it through another semester. A friend of mine who felt similarly and I transferred off of our hall. Suddenly, things took a turn for the better. I was able to spend my time with who I wanted, and found people who shared my openness to diversity of opinion. For a long time, this worked well for me. My frustration with those who had tried to silence any diverse thought moved to the back of my mind until my junior year.

Although I did all I could to ignore and sidestep Haverford's toxic and stifling culture, it became next to impossible during the strike on Haverford's campus in the fall of 2020. By labeling inaction (or alternative means of action to pursue racial justice other than the strike) as racist, the strikers forced everyone to take a stand on their terms, and did everything they could to intimidate people into joining their side. Stories abounded of

strike supporters logging into their classes to note who was still attending and make them face social consequences. During the first few days, many people thought it would be against the strike to eat in the Dining Center, and thus did not go. In the college's school-wide BIPOC group chat, students were mocked if they donated what was deemed an insufficient amount to the strike fund. Clubs discussed expelling members who did not sign the strike support form. One prominent strike supporter tweeted out that the 500 students who had not yet signed the form were "scabs" and that he would track down each one of them. The strike released an FAQ which stated that it was "simply accurate" to describe opposition to the strike in any form as racist. These are just a few of the many, many stories of harassment and intolerance I experienced or heard during that miserable time.

Facing this overwhelming flow of vitriol, I was astounded by what my college had become. Any vestiges of the ideals I had praised in the Quaker meeting house were dashed from my mind. The strike had become a war against individuality. Trust, concern, and respect clearly only applied to those whose views perfectly aligned with the (purported) majoritarian opinion, or those who convincingly faked it. However, none of this is what ultimately convinced me that I had to do something. That happened when one of my friends sent a message in a club group chat in which he praised one of the emails sent out by President Raymond early on in the strike. Almost immediately, someone in the group privately messaged him, saying angrily that he had no right to voice his opinion on the matter. He was told to "think before you speak" and to think of the space he took up as a white man. In essence, he was being told that his opinion did not matter, and that he should refrain from speaking his mind again. I was there when he received this text, and watched as he emotionally crumbled under the pressure of being disrespected in such a fundamental way. When he left my dorm, I broke down in tears, ashamed of the culture which felt that he had no right, as a human being and member of the community, to speak his mind. This was, for me, the last straw. My Kronstadt moment, which had begun more than two years before on my customs hall, finally came to fruition. I felt not only disillusioned, but called to action. The stifling atmosphere had to be broken apart, and I could think of only one way to do this: public dissent.

I typed furiously over the next day, writing about why I thought the strike was wrong. Although my argument touched on some of their outlandish demands, my ultimate

critique was much more fundamental; the strike's ideology and actions did not respect diversity of opinion, and did everything it could to banish disagreement from the public sphere through shaming and harassment.

I sent the article to the two campus newspapers under a pseudonym, Publius, a reference to the Federalist Papers. Given the atmosphere I described, it was not a surprise to me that one campus newspaper flatly refused to publish my article during the strike, while the other would only entertain the possibility if I agreed to fundamentally change my argument. Their unwillingness to publish my piece, not rooted in its quality but in their disagreement with its content, only further convinced me that it must be disseminated. I needed to show the college that Haverford's disrespect for free expression was not just social, but institutional.

A group of likeminded students and I wrote up a preface to my article, explaining how it had been rejected by the campus newspapers and why we thought the ability to express the views written was important. I printed around 800 copies of the article and snuck out in the dead of night. Before dawn broke, the article was posted all over campus, including almost all residential and academic buildings. I collapsed into bed and slept into the afternoon. By the time I woke up, things had taken a turn for the worse.

The strike organizers had checked the printer records in the library to figure out who had written the article and quickly zeroed in on me as a target. This felt like a major invasion of privacy, but that was the least of my concerns. On social media and an online version of my article, things quickly became quite ugly. A Bryn Mawr student posted a tweet fantasizing about killing Publius, the pseudonym that I adopted, and dozens of students liked it. A member of my first-year hall, who I considered a friend during my first year of college, retweeted it. Another Bryn Mawr student posted a link to my article on Twitter and encouraged people to bully me in the comments. Unsurprisingly, many obliged. In the comments attached to my article, multiple people called me ugly. In the worst comment I saw, which has since been deleted, someone made a crude remark about my conception and expressed the wish that it had never happened. Strike supporters made a Google document in which they wrote that they wanted to cause me pain and discriminate against me. In the email account I set up under my pseudonym, I quickly began to receive spam mail, most notably including

many with connections to pigs and pork. Presumably, this was some kind of cruel joke about my weight. One student sent me a long email with a link to a site about sex toys.

While all of this was quite awful for me, things got even worse when one of my professors sent an unhinged email to the entire student body about the strike. The email's content and structure made it clear that he was experiencing a severe mental health crisis. After saying at the end of the email that he had a secret plan that he would not share, he promptly emailed me on my Publius email account. The message addressed me by my real name, and had the subject line "LOL." This for me was a moment of utter disbelief and breakdown. First, the strike supporters had set about to bully me and make me feel unwelcome on campus. Now, they had shared my identity with a mentally unstable professor, who had presumably incorporated me into his "secret plans." I was afraid that he would send an email revealing my identity to the whole school. I was also worried about my physical safety on campus due to his unsteady mental state. College deans urged me to move to the Campus Center for the night for the sake of my own safety, and I obliged. It was at this point that I fully realized that the strike had spiraled into a realm beyond campus drama, into a place where people were legitimately made afraid for their physical safety, and by an employee of the college no less.

Although things settled down somewhat after the strike ended, they never quite went back to normal. About a month after the strike ended, two strike organizers yelled obscenities at me, completely unprompted, as I was walking to dinner on campus. I was so traumatized by the whole incident that I left campus prematurely for the holidays that night. I would often be met with stares and whispers, and some people flat out refused to speak to me. One of my friendships fell apart after my friend said he thought I deserved to be bullied and harassed for what I had done. When I got a scholarship for graduate school and it was announced on Haverford's Instagram, someone posted a taunting and derogatory comment that was clearly in reference to my opposition to the strike. Even recently, I had someone from Haverford with whom I was fairly well acquainted start shunning me, presumably because of what I wrote two years ago.

Why, I wondered often, was the response to me so negative and long-lasting? After much reflection, I believe I have an answer. People were angry because I was the first (though thankfully not the last) to publicly raise serious objections to the strike and its

methods. I had shattered the illusion that the student body was unified behind the way that the strike conducted itself. I showed people that dissent was possible, and the strikers thought this was a dangerous idea. This also explains the severity of the statements and actions against me. Strikers were not just trying to silence me, but to show everyone else what happened to someone who publicly dissented. I was made an example of, used to warn other people what might happen to them if they voiced opposition to campus orthodoxy. Thus, the bullying and threats against me served a wider goal; to make others reconsider before speaking up for what they believed in. It need not be said, but these actions are not in the spirit of Haverford's values of trust, concern, and respect. The harassment against me only reinforced the extent to which these values were being flagrantly disregarded, or twisted beyond recognition.

I did not steer away from telling the administration exactly what happened to me after the strike. I sent them screenshots of all of the physical threats against me; they took no action. Of particular note are the interactions I had with President Raymond, who expressed little care for the issue at hand. When I told President Raymond that I had been physically threatened for making my voice heard on campus, she responded that I should learn to just "let it flow over me." She later gave me a book called Being Peace, and urged me to empathize with the students who had harassed and physically threatened me, saying that I could never understand "the trauma which had brought them to that place" as a white man (that many of the students who harassed and physically threatened me were also white did not seem to register with her). I wondered whether she had asked the strike organizers to empathize with me and think about the trauma I was going through. At a later meeting, when I asked her to send an email condemning bullying and upholding the right to free expression, she refused, saying flatly that there were other priorities she cared more about. Time and again President Raymond demonstrated, through both her words and her actions, that she cared little about maintaining open expression on campus. Trust, concern, and respect were evidently being supported only for those whose views adhered to certain prescriptions.

After all that I have been through, I still think it was the right thing to do to disseminate my article on that night over two years ago. There would certainly be things I would change about the article, a feeling I tend to have about many things I write when looking at them years later, but that is besides the point. Of everything I did at college, that article was the ultimate expression of my trust, concern, and respect for the Haverford

community. Although those values had been lost, I saw a future in which they could be recovered. I still do. But to do so, Haverford must reckon with what it did to me, and to so many others who opposed the strike or voiced any unpopular opinion while at college — for although the strike may have been the most visceral demonstration of the campus community's intolerance to viewpoint diversity, it is simply one of many events which demonstrate this unfortunate truth. Haverford must become the school I thought it was when I stood up in that meeting house room at the beginning of my first year. To do that, there has to be institutional work towards and public support amongst students for the free exchange of ideas. Without this, Haverford will remain untethered to any of the ideals that originally brought me and so many others there in the first place.

— Trevor Stern '22, for The New Kronstadt (Dec 1, 2022)

The Facade of Apathy — a Reflection on Political Disengagement

A “Kronstadt Moment” story by Ben Schiltz

> *“Government and politics spark my intellectual curiosity. Not only do I enjoy learning about government in the classroom, but I love applying my knowledge of government to outside environments. These places include the Young Democrats and Young Republicans clubs at my school, political discussions with friends, and my favorite place to apply my knowledge: Tower Hill's Student Government Association (SGA). As an SGA representative, I have taken an active role in advocating on behalf of my peers and proposing school policy that will benefit the students. Like political philosopher John Locke, I believe that the government derives its power from the consent of the governed."*

The above quotation comes from one of the supplemental admissions essays which I submitted to Haverford College as a high school student. In high school, I had a great interest in law and politics, and I wanted to learn as much as I could about these ideas. My favorite high school class was American Government, and most of my clubs and interests centered around government-related topics. It was around this time that I developed a desire to attend law school, a desire I still have today.

Perhaps the most striking thing about looking back at this quote from my application to Haverford is that I included my involvement in both the Young Democrats and Young Republicans clubs. While this is factually correct — I was involved in both clubs — I am surprised now that I would have even mentioned my association with a Young Republicans club when applying to Haverford. The truth was — at that time — I did not know which political party I would join. I knew that I held a set of developing political beliefs, some of which aligned with Republicans, others with Democrats. I had no problem, therefore, joining both clubs at my school, soaking up as much information as

possible, and trying to become as best informed as I could about my own budding political beliefs.

Entering Haverford, furthermore, I was a curious student who wanted to engage with politics and government. I did not care about the political views of the person I was talking to, and frankly, I was still trying to figure out my own political views. It was within my freshman hall that I first started engaging in political conversations at Haverford. Unsurprisingly, at an institution like Haverford, I found that the majority of the students were more left-leaning than myself. I took no problem with this, and had a lot of great conversations at the time with friends who were more left-leaning. On the reverse side, I met people with views more conservative than mine (albeit there were fewer people in this category) and found it equally engaging to talk to them.

More heated dialogue arose, however, when the more left-wing and more conservative students conversed and argued. I remember a particular moment when a group of about 10 of my hallmates were watching a basketball game on TV. In response to an incident of police brutality in Milwaukee, several players from both the Miami Heat and the Milwaukee Bucks kneeled during the national anthem. One player on the Heat, however, chose not to. Naturally, we were all curious why this one player chose to stand. We all quickly pulled out our phones and googled the incident. The player had a brother serving in the military and chose to stand during the anthem out of respect for him. Immediately, this prompted outrage from students watching the game, who vocally criticized the player's decision not to kneel. In response, other students argued that the player should be able to stand out of respect for his brother. This sparked a rather heated debate. Sitting there listening, I concluded that I believed the player should be able to stand, as that was his choice. I did not, however, want to vocalize this belief in his right to free expression. I felt worried that if I said something, my more left-leaning friends would be unhappy with my stance. I felt caught in the middle of this debate, and ultimately, left the room without contributing a word.

In moments like that one, I wish that I would have made my voice heard and been more authentic to my feelings. During my freshman year, I struggled with this a lot. Do I, as a more politically moderate student, voice all of my beliefs openly, or do I keep my views close to my chest so as to not stir controversy? I grappled with these questions

throughout my freshman year, and this ultimately culminated in a decision that I made during the student strike in the Fall of 2020.

As most members of the Haverford community are aware, towards the end of the Haverford strike, a document emerged titled “Students for Trust, Concern and Respect.” This document acknowledged the need for systemic change in the college, a goal that the strike also supported, but questioned the strike’s methodology, and the push to cancel classes in particular. The document also spoke to the harmful campus climate that emerged during the strike. The atmosphere on campus was one that silenced dialogue and repressed dissension. As the “Students for Trust, Concern, and Respect” letter put it: “the organizers of the strike actively subdue any sort of criticism of their movement.” Those words resonated with me. I supported the need for a student strike, but disagreed with its methodology. I felt that I could not express this view for fear of being labeled as a “racist” or a non-supporter and that signing this document was the best way to do so without jeopardizing the friendships and relationships I had. Ultimately, I signed the “Students for Trust, Concern, and Respect” document, choosing to prioritize the authenticity of my feelings over maintaining a facade born of silence. My signature, along with those of many other students, expressed a need for a change in Haverford’s climate and a concern for the well-being of free speech on campus.

The consequences of being authentic to my beliefs, however, manifested in the calamitous aftermath of signing this document. Many of my close friends grew distant and decided that as someone who “signed the anti-strike document,” I could no longer be their friend. As a student attending an already-small school, I felt my network of friends growing smaller and smaller. I tried to justify that the document was not an anti-strike document but rather something that supported the strike just through a different methodology, but this argument did not resonate with many of my friends. Although this happened almost two years ago, I still think about this moment, as it embodies a greater problem at Haverford and leftist academic institutions as a whole. Students, like myself, are caught between either conforming to a “woke” viewpoint or remaining authentic to their beliefs at the expense of friendships.

Over the course of the next couple of years, I found myself far less vocal about politics. I stopped engaging in conversations with people out of hesitation that my beliefs and more moderate ideology wouldn’t be accepted. I limited my network of friends to people

that thought more like myself and decided that not talking about politics and appearing uninterested in politics was the best path towards preserving my friendships without jeopardizing my political outlook. I call this phenomenon the “facade of apathy,” and believe that many students at Haverford and other predominantly leftist academic institutions are impacted by this concept. For me, appearing uninterested or unknowledgeable about politics became helpful in maintaining friendships. After seeing what signing a document could do to harm some of my relationships, I decided staying quiet was the best way of coping. In fact, I pretend to be dumb. When political conversations arose that might be difficult or spark controversy, instead of raising my voice, I ‘played dumb,’ pretending not to know anything about the issue. Although this alternative was less authentic and less brave, I found it easier. Apathy became a coping mechanism where respectful dialogue between a left-wing and conservative student was virtually impossible. To this day, I prioritize my social life and friendships over political vocalization. If you ask many of my friends, especially those whom I have met in the last two years, they will probably tell you that I have no political opinions or that I’m just ‘not really a political guy.’ This could not be further from the truth.

In writing this article, I hope to take a step in a positive direction towards revitalizing campus dialogue. I think there are actually a lot of students that feel the same way as I do. Rather than being silent, I think I should be more passionate and proud about the political views I hold. Looking back on the high school student that I was, I was so eager to become invested in politics and political conversations. I want to hold on to that part of myself, especially as someone wanting to enter law school after college. Rather than putting up a facade of apathy, I hope to engage in more dialogue, encourage difference, and be authentic to what I believe in. I encourage my peers to do the same, and I hope to learn from our conversations together.

— Ben Schiltz ‘24, for The New Kronstadt (Jan 1, 2023)

Haverford's Honor Code is Infringing Student Speech Rights and in Need of Revision

A "Kronstadt Moment" story by Dortohy Rona Feldman

"The Isaac Sharpless quote … is a charge to each and every one of us to be an independent and critical thinker and actor. It is a charge to the Haverford Community and to Haverford leaders to do the right thing as individual conscience dictates. It is a stricture against following the crowd or acquiescing to peer pressure and a powerful affirmation of the value of each individual and the inner light in all of us. The quote and the Quaker values it reflects are core to Haverford's unique character to this day."

— Charles G. Beever '74, Chair of the Board of Managers, upon the presentation of the Sharpless quote to Wendy Raymond at her inauguration as Haverford College's 16th president.

*** * ***

I am a Haverford graduate. The major factors that attracted me to Haverford were the Honor Code and Haverford's Quaker heritage principles, along with the excellent liberal arts education and the caring community. Sadly, if I were now facing the decision of where to attend college, I would no longer be able to consider Haverford.

You see, I would no longer be able to sign the Honor Code.

The Honor Code is a student produced, adopted, and administered document that evolves continuously. The strength of this document is its relevance to both current students and the historical values of the college. It has always changed, and it should never remain static.

The spring plenary of 2021 adopted a version of the Code that, to me, makes unacceptable limitations on students' freedom of speech and thought — and forces them to adhere to one particular political ideology. Personally, I could not sign this

pledge, nor would I. I believe the current Code needs to be amended by students, and that the faculty should also guarantee freedom of thought and speech at Haverford.

At Haverford, as most readers already know, a strike occurred in the fall of 2020. I learned about it somewhat later, after reading a news article, "Schools Must Resist Destructive Anti-racist Demands," by John McWhorter, a Professor at Columbia University. The article described a student strike at Bryn Mawr, and made reference to a strike at Haverford. Unaware of the details involved, I set out to learn more about what had happened.

I started to read articles in the various Haverford news sources: The Clerk, the Bi-Co News, and Haverford Magazine — the alumni periodical. From there I expanded my sources and read accounts in broader, legacy media outlets, like the Philadelphia Inquirer. Then I started to have direct conversations with various members of the Haverford Community, people who actually experienced the strike and could share their perspectives and insights with me. These contacts included current students, recent graduates, current administrators and faculty members, current parents, members of the Board and other alumni.

These interviews confirmed the validity of the published accounts. Every person agreed that there were some very valid concerns raised by the protestors, and that addressing those particular concerns was positive. However, many people also gave specific details about the troubling tactics used, threats and intimidation levied against students who were not "all-in" on the strike. Many were concerned about the cancellation of classes for two weeks and the loss of academic, subject-related learning that occurred as a result. Most thought that while some of the goals of the strike were laudable, the strike itself was not. Many expressed that the methods used during the strike were "un-Haverfordian" and violated community standards and the protected rights to free speech, sanctity of conscience, and free association.

Following the strike, students approved changes to the Honor Code. These changes now require all students to adhere to so-called "anti-racist" ideology and make speech that is objectionable to someone in the community a punishable offense.

The spring plenary of 2021 which produced these changes was unique. As The Clerk noted: "While Fall Plenary did not happen in 2020 due to the campus-wide … strike,

Spring Plenary … happen(ed) asynchronously and virtually over a two-week period at the end of April and the beginning of May." During a period of stress and disruption, and through a modified Plenary, students adopted amendments that are incommensurate with Haverfordian community values and the college's official policies on free expression. These changes to the Honor Code earned Haverford a "red light" rating by FIRE, a civil liberties organization, indicating that the Honor Code "both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech."

Freedom of speech is a right that Haverford College commits to upholding as an institution. In the Dean's Handbook, the school promises: "Haverford College holds that open-minded and free inquiry is essential to a student's educational development. Thus, the College recognizes the right of all students to engage in discussion, to exchange thought and opinion, and to speak or write freely on any subject."

As FIRE explains, private colleges have an obligation to make good on these promises:

> *While private institutions are not directly legally bound to uphold the Constitution, those that promise debate and freedom are morally bound—and may be contractually bound, depending on the circumstances—to uphold the fundamental principles of free speech and of academic freedom, principles that underlie the First Amendment.*

The ACLU, another civil liberties watchdog, has long emphasized the importance of free speech, and describes what used to be common sense at Haverford: "An open society depends on liberal education, and the whole enterprise of liberal education is founded on the principle of free speech." Haverford, a liberal arts educational institution, was founded by Quakers, whose religious expression was grounded in the idea that all people were capable of receiving divine insights and that "being moved to speak" was how this truth was revealed.

Campus free speech issues in a national context

The attack on free speech in higher education is a national trend which grows worse each year. FIRE reported that in 2023, "the percentage of schools earning an overall red light rating increased. Of the 486 schools included in FIRE's Spotlight database, 94 earn

an overall ‘red light’, just 60 schools earn an overall ‘green light’ rating for maintaining policies that do not seriously imperil free expression.”

American college students increasingly report infringement on free speech and self-censorship. A 2016 Ipsos poll conducted for the Knight Foundation found that 54% of college students strongly/somewhat agreed that the climate at their school/campus prevented some people from saying things they believed because others might find it offensive. By 2021, that number had increased to 65%. A survey conducted by Heterodox Academy found that “the percentage of students who believe the climate on campus prevents some people from saying things they believe increased from 54.7% in 2019 to 63.5% in 2021.” Across the board, students reported high rates of discomfort speaking freely on their college campuses.

Despite the increases in student self-censorship and institutional policies limiting free speech on campus, students report an increasing desire for free speech on college campuses. The Heterodox Academy poll found that American students consistently expressed strong support for free speech on campus in 2020 and 2021. Statements supporting the value of open inquiry and free expression in college responses ranged from 68.2 % to 88.0%. The Ipsos poll found that a small minority of students, between 18% and 22%, agreed that colleges should protect students by prohibiting speech they may find offensive or biased.

Statistics confirm Haverford's free speech problem

The 2018-2019 Clearness Report conducted at Haverford found that “approximately 53% of respondents reported that talking about politics on campus made them uncomfortable to some degree, with 7% of respondents reported that it made them very uncomfortable” (page 21).

A 2022 poll conducted by College Pulse for FIRE looked at 208 top U.S. Colleges, including Haverford, which had 154 students respondents. Nearly half of Haverfordians stated that they experienced a good deal or great deal of pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in classes. A third of students responded that they often or fairly often could not express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond. A sizable portion, 57%, responded that they were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political

topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space. Moreover, students lacked confidence in the administration's position on free speech. When asked how clear it was that the administration protects free speech, 62% replied that it was somewhat clear or less. In this national College Pulse survey, Haverford ranked near the very bottom for students' comfort in expressing ideas (200th), its disruptive conduct policy (171st), and level of administrative support for free expression (171st). Haverford did perform strongly on tolerance of speakers (5th), but this has been an issue in prior years, such as 2014, when Robert Birgeneau's commencement address was canceled.

Haverford's Climate Survey Report, released September 2022, "described observations of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and hostile conduct due to respondents' political beliefs." Haverford students stated that "a significant portion of the campus felt alienated for sharing their view on the strike, as well as on a number of political issues," that "Discussion of the political climate is taboo," and "As a progressive, I feel that anyone who isn't (an extreme) leftist is automatically shunned and silenced" (page 110). Only 45% of students responded that they "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that "the campus climate at Haverford encouraged open discussion on difficult topics" (page 212). Of all respondents, students and faculty/staff, 44.5% reported observing bullying and harassment (page 318), with 37% witnessing more than 5 instances in the past year (page 319). The target of the insult was primarily a student, 73.8% of respondents answered (page 320). The basis of this intimidation was the target's political views (39.4%), followed by racial identity (30.6%), and athletic status (19.3%) (page 230).

These surveys paint a picture of student life at Haverford as one in which many students are uncomfortable with expressing themselves with others on campus, both in academic settings and in private ones. Most students are not clear if the administration supports free speech. Intimidation, bullying and other retaliatory conduct is experienced on campus, mostly by students, and mainly for expressing their political views or due to their racial or athletic identities.

Haverford's newly-revised Honor Code targets political speech

Haverford has a rather homogeneous student body when it comes to political beliefs. According to the 2018-19 Clearness Report, "overall, the campus is quite liberal. 79% of

respondents self-identified as liberal to some extent. Among liberal students, more centrism is observed than we expected. Only 17% of our respondents identified as very liberal while almost half the student body (44%) identified as liberal" (page 20). At Haverford, where most students have a shared political viewpoint, retaliatory behaviors are mostly likely to target students because of their political views.

With this perspective, let us now return to the earlier topic of the changes to the Honor Code of spring 2021. Laura Beltz, director of Policy Reform at FIRE, explains the organization's objection to the Honor Code's speech restrictions:

> *A recent amendment to (Haverford's) Social Honor Code means students could be subject to punishment if other students determine they've committed an 'act of … microaggression.' The amendment also states that students must be respectful of 'community standards' when expressing 'political opinions,' and that 'political beliefs [that] perpetuate discrimination,' or that are used to 'justify disrespectful or discriminatory words,' violate the code.*

Before President Wendy Raymond accepted the resolution amending the Honor Code, FIRE wrote to Haverford, objecting to the proposed amendments — along with existing language in the Honor Code — incompatible with Haverford's commitments to its students' expressive freedom. FIRE called on the administration to reject the proposed amendments and to ensure the Honor Code would be free of any language restricting protected speech. On June 13, 2021, President Raymond accepted the resolution and admitted in a letter to the Haverford community that "[a] reasonable person might see language in this amendment that causes them to worry about whether they are free to share their views, whether a political affiliation, a stance on public policy, or a religious value at odds with others."

The new section of the Honor Code which demands adherence to a particular ideology, encourages compelled speech, and holds political speech as subject to Honor Code trial, reads:

> *Further, we commit to being actively anti-racist, not just passively 'not racist.' As such, we commit to continually educating ourselves, holding others accountable, and practicing anti- racism in our daily lives. This includes, but is not limited to: rejecting anti-Blackness, recognizing white privilege, challenging structures of*

> *whiteness and white comfort, and crediting the work of BIPOC and especially women of color. This commitment should not be treated passively, as passivity condones white supremacy and the multitude of systems it creates. We also recognize that a person's political opinions are necessarily intertwined with their values and outlook, and thus influence their practices, which may violate the Honor Code. As such, students must be respectful of community standards when expressing political opinions.*

By signing the Honor Code, a student is forced to practice one particular ideology, "anti-racism," which experts have criticized for making racist assumptions. By stating that "a person's political opinions are necessarily intertwined with their values and outlook," the Honor Code suggests constraints on students' ability to hold differing views on political issues. This mandate promotes uniformity and oppresses viewpoint diversity. Is this in keeping with Haverford's stated values? Does Haverford value diversity, equity and inclusion? If so, then this forced adherence to anti-racism ideology is neither increasing diversity nor fostering inclusion.

In my opinion, the 2021 Honor Code constrains students' freedom of speech, limits viewpoint diversity, and mandates a particular adherence to a particular ideology. The administration supports these changes. Many students express that they are inhibited by constraints on speech on campus, and most are unclear if the administration is protecting their freedom of speech. Fortunately, current Haverford students, who are the authors of the Honor Code, can amend the problematic language of the current document.

Students should re-examine the problematic sections of the Honor Code, and I encourage them to act. Likewise, I turn to the Haverford faculty and ask that they consider adopting the Chicago Statement, or craft a version that is tailored to Haverford. The Chicago Statement is the free speech policy statement that was produced by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago in July 2014. Over 80 schools have since adopted it. The faculty can enshrine the rights of all Haverford students to have freedom of thought and speech, and to prohibit political litmus tests and compelled speech on campus.

Finally, I invite other alumni who are concerned about the current campus atmosphere regarding free speech and limited diversity of thought to contact President Raymond with your objections.

— Dorothy Rona Feldman ‘84, for The New Kronstadt (Feb 11, 2023)

Dorothy writes: “In the Quaker tradition, I was moved to speak. My message, not my identity, is what I ask you to consider.”

“Think Piece” Articles

From Berkeley to Haverford: Have we forgotten the progressive history of free speech?

A “Think Piece” article

In the 1960s, students at the University of California, Berkeley formed the storied Free Speech Movement to counter “the old-school ideas of paternalistic university supervision” that prevented them from fully participating in Vietnam War protests and the civil rights movement. Their civil liberties victories helped catalyze new waves of political expression on college campuses across the country, with the effects reverberating for decades afterward.

Haverford College, where I am a student, played a role in this history. Students, faculty, and administrators at the historic Quaker school were deeply involved in the era’s social justice movements. In May 1964, Haverford students traveled to New York City to protest United States involvement in the war in South Vietnam, forming the core of a 400-student rally and march. In May 1970, on the heels of the Kent State massacre,

Haverford President Jack Coleman "bused nearly 700 students, teachers, board members and alumni to Washington to protest the American bombing campaign in Cambodia."

At the time, the Haverford community saw the exercise of free speech as crucial not only to the nation's progress, but also to a Haverford education — befitting of the school's motto: "Not more learned, but steeped in a higher learning."

In the 1960s and '70s, it was clear to students at schools like UC Berkeley and Haverford that free speech was indispensable to achieving progress on the most pressing issues of the day. The idea that civil liberties and civil rights were co-dependent seemed obvious, given the recent history of free speech at the time. In the 1910s and '20s, free speech formed the cornerstone of women's suffrage, while in the 1950s and '60s, it was essential to the strategy of gay rights advocates like Frank Kameny.

Today, however, free speech is often considered a "conservative talking point," and students at schools that once championed free speech now view civil liberties and civil rights as conflicting priorities. In recent years at Berkeley, students have shut down controversial speakers, while at Haverford, a recently adopted amendment to the Honor Code subjects students' political speech to what is referred to as "Social Trial" before the student-led Honor Council.

Many on the left, where I stand politically, assume that free speech — although it has a nice history — only benefits conservatives these days. Some of my peers think of speech as a "tool of the powerful, not the powerless." Yet students and administrators who advance the dissonant notion that speech restrictions go hand-in-hand with social justice would be well-served to familiarize themselves with those who are often the primary targets of censorship: dissidents and government critics alongside racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities.

It is a mistake to understand the current free speech crisis as one in which the left triumphs while conservatives are silenced: some of the worst offenders are conservative universities and states that crack down on left-wing speech. Nobody has anything to gain by curbing freedom of thought and expression. We do not have to choose between justice and freedom; we must have both.

Last year, when FIRE wrote to Haverford and pointed out that the proposed Honor Code amendment could silence both Palestinian activists and Zionists, our president approved the new speech code anyway, ironically promising to "ensure that normative expectations do not chill the thoughtful expression of ideas or beliefs" on campus.

Confronted by critics who argue that the language found in speech codes is broad enough to sanction social justice movements, college administrators across the country are quick to promise that they will not enforce their speech codes in such a manner. Despite such assurances, last school year students and faculty nationwide were censored for affiliating with the Black Lives Matter movement; investigated for including provocative black and queer authors on their syllabi; and punished for protesting human rights abuses by the Chinese government — all of which is political speech that would be protected under First Amendment standards, and much of which is progressive. While some of these incidents occurred at private institutions, which are not bound by the First Amendment, such schools often promise free speech protections to their faculty and students, making them morally — if not contractually — bound to honor those promises.

Though Haverford is a private institution, its policy on Expressive Freedom and Responsibility recognizes "the right of all students to engage in discussion, to exchange thought and opinion, and to speak or write freely on any subject." Given Haverford's proud free speech history and strong formal commitment to freedom of expression in its Faculty Handbook, the school should have rejected last year's Honor Code amendment, which even our president admitted might cause "a reasonable person" to "worry about whether they are free to share their views, whether a political affiliation, a stance on public policy, or a religious value at odds with others" on campus.

Even if administrators stick to their word and don't allow speech codes to be enforced in ways that stifle political discourse, such practices are temporary and subject to change. When the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley began, it was out of anger over the enforcement of a speech code that administrators had chosen not to enforce in years prior.

Berkeley's practice of turning a blind eye to political expression on campus changed when outside pressure (largely from the state legislature) forced administrators to take action.

Sound familiar? The current moment couldn't be more similar. As former ACLU director Ira Glasser explained, "Speech restrictions are like poison gas. It seems like it's a great weapon to have when you've got the poison gas in your hands . . . but the wind has a way of shifting . . . and suddenly that poison gas is being blown back on you."

So, in pursuit of social progress, what are "kindly inquisitors" at schools like Haverford to do, if not police expression by banning certain acts of political speech?

There is a Quaker saying that offers some applicable wisdom: "Let your life speak."

Those who believe themselves to be on the right side of history should lead by example rather than deprive their opposition of fundamental civil liberties. Frederick Douglass once called free speech "the great moral renovator of society and government." It is up to us to keep the conversation going if we hope to improve our communities and our country.

Forcing those who don't hold progressive views into silence will not bring lasting change. Sincere shifts in social attitudes are the only ones that count. If you force someone to adopt the "one true opinion," all you will breed is resentment and backlash — not enlightenment. True progress has always been made and always will be made through open discussion, collective exploration, and careful deliberation — not the cudgel of imposed thought, compelled speech, and heavy-handed censorship.

Six decades have passed and the lessons of the 1960s often lie forgotten. Wavering at the first criticism, our leaders pay nothing more than lip service to the values the First Amendment enshrines. Those of us who care about changing societal attitudes for the better must remember what got us here: faith in free speech and free thought. Freedom of speech is an eternally radical idea, and it is not too late to recommit ourselves to its principles. In fact, our future as free people depends on it. The zealous free speech radicalism of the sixties must return. It's time to change course.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Oct 11, 2022)

Originally published June 17, 2022 on FIRE's Newsdesk (linked here)

Comeback of the catechism: When today's speech norms launch old inquisitions

A "Think Piece" article

The consequences of American "cancel culture" for artistic freedom and civil liberties are often minimized and dismissed by public figures for not rising to sufficiently injurious levels. "Cancel culture," they claim, "in the terms it is culturally viewed in, does not exist."

There aren't any Americans being put to death or tortured as a consequence for speech, talking heads reason, as if free expression in-and-of-itself is not a human right (it is). "This isn't the Spanish Inquisition," they argue, excusing a trend that Americans largely oppose by claiming that "careers are not destroyed."

Champions of "cancel culture" may claim it does not cause people to lose their jobs, but such contentions are nothing more than "alternative facts" which the record clearly demonstrates to be false. Those who instigate, excuse, or support modern-day censorship, while often insisting social progress is their goal, ignore how unenlightened and backwards their actions actually are. Their eager dismissals of an issue so elemental to democracy itself — one's very ability and willingness to speak — are historically uninformed and naively short-sighted.

The Spanish Inquisition wasn't always "The Rack," "The Wheel," and the torture chamber. In fact, in its later years, as Europe underwent Enlightenment, the Inquisition's consequences came to resemble the comparatively mild punishments doled out by American "cancel culture" today: threats to professional reputation and employment, pervasive self-censorship, and widespread environs of chilled speech, particularly in the artistic realm.

Comparing modern American "cancel culture" to the final years of the Inquisition isn't mere hyperbole: a case study from Penn State Schuylkill demonstrates how today's speech norms are literally reviving those of the late Inquisition. "La maja desnuda," a painting by the illustrious Francisco de Goya, was first censored by inquisitors in

nineteenth-century Spain, and later by Penn State Schuylkill administrators at the doorstep of the twenty-first century in the United States.

The censors who persecuted this single painting, in different countries and in different eras, even employed the same strategy: removing the work from public view and hiding it away in a room less accessible to the public. The contemporary American university, like Madrid during the late Inquisition, is not hospitable to expression which challenges the boundaries of dominant codes of morality. Whether called "political correctness" — as it was branded in the 1990s when the "Maja" incident took place — or "cancel culture," as it is more commonly called today, censorship is a cyclical scourge that constantly rebrands itself to make its repeated sin more palatable for the present day.

Censorship during the late Spanish Inquisition

In early 1800s Madrid, artistic masterpieces by Goya, Velázquez, and Titian lay beyond reproach in a private room belonging to Spain's prime minister, Manuel Godoy. Siloed away from the public, the repressive, chilling climate produced by the Spanish Inquisition effectively made some of the finest art in the country inaccessible to all but the most trusted visitors — even when the art's owner was the most powerful man in Spanish civil society.

In 1800, Godoy had commissioned Goya's "Maja" to adorn the walls of his private gabinete interior, or inner cabinet, and the privacy with which he shielded Goya's work likely reflected its transgressive theme: the painting was an avant-garde representation of a nude woman, similar to the Velázquez and Titian depictions in the room but more radical by nature since it contained no mythological framing or historical narrative to excuse the nudity it depicted. Fifteen years later, the prime minister's wary, secretive approach to the display of the lascivious paintings in his collection appeared prudent.

On March 16, 1815, as Godoy lay exiled in France, Goya received a summons from the Secret Chamber of the Inquisition in Madrid, requesting that he testify as to whether two sequestered paintings "were his work, why he made them, who commissioned them, and for what purpose." The paintings in question — "La maja desnuda (The Nude Maja)" and "La maja vestida (The Clothed Maja)" — were revolutionary images which went beyond the boundaries of acceptable artistic expression in Spain at the time. Under the Inquisition, even biblically-inspired religious art was subject to censorship by

the Catholic Church, with paintings that displayed nudity or heterodox ideas facing scrutiny, trial, confiscation, and sometimes destruction.

15 years after Godoy commissioned the “Maja” paintings for his *gabinete interior* of forbidden images, Goya was to answer for them. Protected by the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, Goya largely evaded punishment. Yet his paintings lay confined to the basement of a government building for years, off-limits to the public. The sequestered paintings did not publicly resurface until 1819, with the founding of one of Spain’s most famous public institutions, the Museo Nacional del Prado, of which Godoy’s collection was the initial germ.

The removal of art from the public sphere was a common theme of the late Spanish Inquisition, depriving the country’s citizens of artistic treasures and cultural enrichment for years.

Unfortunately, this trend has resurfaced in contemporary American culture, too.

Censorship at the modern American university

On Nov. 7, 1991, a memo circulated at Penn State Schuylkill (then-called Pennsylvania State University Commonwealth Campus) announcing “it [had] come to the attention of [the] affirmative action office that one of the art reproductions . . . hanging in [Room] C-203 could contribute to a chilly climate in that classroom, and, thus, be in violation of the law concerning sexual harassment.” As the memo claimed, “The reason given is that the reproduction in question, although a recognized art work [sic], is being displayed in a classroom rather than in a gallery or museum setting . . . Therefore, because we have no defined gallery space for art displays, all reproductions will be removed from C-203 and placed in storage.”

What the memo didn’t mention is that the work was purchased over a decade earlier for an art history course taught in the same classroom — surely, they didn’t mean to imply that a “recognized art work,” even of a lascivious nature, couldn’t be taught in class.

Or did they?

This wasn’t the first time Goya’s “Maja” had been targeted at PSU Schuylkill. Until the fall of 1991, the room had primarily been used as a music classroom, and instructor

Paul Miller had refused requests from campus administrators to remove the work, citing censorship as his chief concern.

When the censors at PSU Schuylkill finally won out over Goya's "Maja," administrators took down the rest of the art in the classroom along with it. As with Godoy's gabinete, the other paintings hanging alongside Goya's "Maja" also contained themes that made censors uncomfortable, and the paintings were deemed guilty by association. The "Maja" scandal not only led to the censorship of Goya's image, but also the removal of — a journal article on the controversy recounts — "Raphael's Madonna of the Chair, Bronzino's Portrait of a Young Man, the central panel of Crucifixion with Virgin and Saints by Perugino, and a van Ruisdael landscape, Wheatfields" (links to artworks added for reference).

Eventually, the works were allowed to resurface, placed high on a wall in a spare room in the Student Center, which received a new, hastily-taped sign reading "Gallery," apparently "to forewarn people that there [was] art in the room."

The moral panic which precipitated such a philistinic intervention — in which a painting was essentially accused of sexual harassment — demonstrates today's skewed campus speech norms, which camouflage old-fashioned censorship in the modern language of social progress.

Today's cancellations pursue yesterday's transgressions

In modern America, art censorship is alive and well on university campuses, coming from both the left and right. Those who defend today's "cancel culture" persecutions claim morality is on their side. We must not forget that yesterday's inquisitors did the same.

Majoritarian impulses to "cancel" provocative art and literature that transgress popular morality echo throughout history. When the United States sought to censor James Joyce's "Ulysses" from bookstore shelves in the 1920s, the government argued that the work was "blasphemous" in its treatment of the Catholic Church and "coarse" in the thoughts and desires its characters openly displayed. In 1956, municipal officials in San Francisco brought Lawrence Ferlinghetti to court for publishing Allen Ginsberg's "Howl" in his City Lights bookstore, arguing the work should be censored for its carnal

language and references to taboo topics like homosexuality and drug use. In 1990, not long before the PSU Schuylkill episode, a sheriff in Cincinnati raided a museum exhibiting the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and indicted its museum director on obscenity charges for displaying Mapplethorpe's transgressive, avant-garde images — which included five explicit depictions of gay S&M culture. In many of these instances, particularly the canceled Mapplethorpe exhibition, the art censorship that took place was politically-motivated and reflected ideological "cancel culture" at its worst.

Throughout American history, the repression of sexuality — especially queer sexuality — has been enforced through censorship, which makes it all the more shocking that so many inquisitorial episodes today are instigated by the left, especially at a time when book banning is reemerging on the right.

Antiquated morals have been refashioned for contemporary tastes, but this does not not make them any less nefarious. "Cancel culture" is nothing new, and the truth about today's in-vogue rebrand of old-fashioned inquisitorial morals is simple: "Cancel culture cancels culture." If we want to collectively pursue truth and beauty in a society that cultivates intellectual enlightenment and the artistic sublime, we must see through the emperor's new clothes and condemn "cancel culture" for the anti-intellectual, moralistic parochialism that it is.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Oct 17, 2022)

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Censored, from the Archives: a Selective Timeline of Art Censorship on Social Media Platforms

A "Think Piece" article

Introduction

Some of the oldest art objects we know of are small, hand-carved stone figurines from the Paleolithic Period which depict women with exaggerated features. As exemplified by the Venus of Willendorf — which art historians believe may have represented an early fertility deity — these statuettes symbolize the awesome power and "divinity" of procreation. In ways both metaphysical and elemental, the Venus of Willendorf and statues like it epitomize our origins as human beings.

Yet despite its centrality to the human story, art depicting the body has faced relentless censorship, investigation, and inquisition over time. Social media giants have doggedly maintained this historical tradition, scrubbing artwork from their platforms that they deem unsuitable for the internet.

In 2018, Facebook infamously censored the 30,000 year old Venus of Willendorf for its stone-carved "nudity." Laura Ghianda, an Italian arts activist, had posted a viral picture of the artwork on the social media platform before Facebook censored the image. Ghianda found this action unacceptable, writing that the "war on human culture and modern intellectualism will not be tolerated."

The Museum of Natural History in Vienna, which displays the Venus of Willendorf in its museum as a part of its collection, similarly found Facebook's action to be an attack on values foundational to the humanities, and expressed outrage over the incident: "An archaeological object, especially such an iconic one, should not be banned from Facebook because of 'nudity,' as no artwork should be," they wrote in a statement.

In response to Facebook's blatant art censorship, the Museum of Natural History in Vienna and the local tourism board opened an account on OnlyFans — an online content subscription service that is primarily used to access and share sexually explicit

images — where the sculpture could be displayed without issue. The "Vienna strips on OnlyFans" advertising campaign was meant to encourage tourists to visit the city and to raise awareness of the censorious standards that art is subjected to on conventional social media platforms.

The prospect of a historic museum's collection being pushed off of Facebook and onto OnlyFans is alarming. Where do we stand as a society if the artistic forms most reflective of our humanity — freely crafted in times so old history was yet to be written — are today unable to be seen in mainstream public forums?

Eventually, Facebook issued a public apology and allowed the image to appear on its platforms, a reversal that a spokesperson explained was due to an oversight: while the company prohibits nudity and suppresses suggested nudity, they "make an exception for statues."

This incident demonstrates the perplexing nature of social media content moderation policies as they relate to artistic expression. While it may appear anomalous, Facebook's censorship reversal is just one of many similar incidents in the history of online art censorship.

Thanks to artist-activists and advocacy groups, social media companies have been pushed to make small changes that allow for greater expressive leeway and increase the transparency of their decision-making. We have gone from famous sculptures and paintings of nude figures being censored uniformly by social media companies to policy changes which now permit paintings, drawings, and sculptures of nude figures to be posted uncensored — though hyperreal works still get mistaken for photographic nudes, which remain prohibited. Bit by bit, we are reclaiming our power to depict and discuss visuals evoking our humanity online.

Yet there is still work to be done: lens-based works that depict or suggest nudity are routinely removed or downranked by social media companies. Given the related ban on female appearing nipples (except in circumstances of protest, nursing, post-op or post-birth moments), this disproportionately affects women and those in the LGBTQ+ communities.

Don't Delete Art fights for artistic freedom online. As we further the cause of free expression, it is worth noting how the origins of online censorship have shaped our

present reality. Alongside the strides and missteps of social networking companies during the early days of social media, the arts community has achieved significant victories that have helped catalyze further openness on the internet. In looking back, we can recognize our strength as we forge ahead to create the future we envision in the Don't Delete Art Manifesto.

The Origins of Online Censorship

The World Wide Web launched in 1993, bringing with it ceaseless questions about what the rules should be for a new, international forum offering an exchange of ideas and information. The rapid innovations of the internet motivated attempts to make this new tool both secure and functional.

One such attempt at legislating the internet was made in the United States. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, better known as the Communications Decency Act, sought to prohibit the posting of "indecent" or "patently offensive" material on the internet. Much of the Communications Decency Act was struck down as unconstitutional due to free speech promises in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, but nevertheless, it also contained specific elements that remained law and have shaped the internet as we know it today.

Section 230 is one such influential law originally part of the Communications Decency Act. It set an important precedent to safeguard freedom of expression online by protecting the intermediaries which host online speech. Passed in 1996, the law states that internet companies hosting third party user content are not responsible for the content uploaded by their users. Therefore, when harmful speech takes place, Section 230 suggests the speaker should be held responsible, rather than the service that hosts the speech.

In 1998, the United States enacted the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which criminalized the dissemination of technology that could bypass copyright protections. The Digital Millennium Copyright Act has been criticized for restricting the fair use of copyrighted materials, legitimate technological innovation, and other forms of research, learning, and expression.

While the United States government has legislated into effect some of the chilled speech environment that permeates the internet (see also SESTA/FOSTA), much of the censorial environs on the web are constructed and enforced by private companies. This is because such companies have their own First Amendment rights that allow them to determine what content or behaviors are prohibited on their platforms. Whereas the Communications Decency Act attempted to use the power of the United States government to try and bar "indecent" and "offensive" material from the internet, today private companies such as domain providers, hosting services, and social media companies restrict content that the government cannot.

The availability of both moderated and unmoderated platforms is important since both offer distinct advantages; moderation prioritizes the First Amendment editorial rights of the content provider while a lack of moderation may permit more expressive leeway to users. Moderation makes many platforms accessible, secure, and functional for users, but other times, overbroad restrictions, and the misapplication of policies, can unfairly suppress user speech. Don't Delete Art encourages companies which host moderated platforms to tailor their restrictions narrowly and apply them fairly, transparently, and consistently.

Selected Historical Examples of Social Media Censorship

In 2011, Facebook suspended the account of a French schoolteacher named Frédéric Durand-Baïssas after he posted a photo of Gustave Courbet's L'Origine du Monde (The Origin of the World) on the social media site. Courbet's painting, which is on display at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, depicts a woman's lower torso, vulva, and legs emerging from bedding which largely covers the figure's breasts. The figure's sprawling position is angled directly at the viewer. Durand-Baïssas sued in French court, arguing that his rights to free speech were compromised since the company did not properly distinguish pornography from art. He remarked: "I was really very angered that a 19th-century French painter, whose work is in the Musée d'Orsay, should be treated as a pornographer. This fight is to defend Courbet, condemned by the Americans, even though we are in France and he's in the Musée d'Orsay." Facebook argued French courts had no jurisdiction since the site's terms specify that legal complaints against the company can only be heard in California. Following a lengthy dispute over whether or not Durand-Baïssas had legal standing to sue, Paris' high court ruled that Facebook

was wrong to shut down his account in 2018. Shortly thereafter, Facebook settled the suit for an undisclosed sum in 2019. The money was donated to the French street art association Le MUR.

In 2016, Facebook censored Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg after she posted Nick Ut's Pulitzer-Prize-winning black and white photo The Terror of War. The photograph, taken in Trảng Bàng, South Vietnam during the Vietnam War, shows a young, naked girl running away from a Napalm attack, and infamously depicts the terror that was wrought by U.S. military tactics upon Vietnamese citizens. Facebook initially stated: "While we recognize that this photo is iconic, it's difficult to create a distinction between allowing a photograph of a nude child in one instance and not others." Kim Phúc, the woman whose childhood trauma was captured in the image, responded: "I'm saddened by those who would focus on the nudity in the historic picture rather than the powerful message it conveys. I fully support the documentary image taken by Nick Ut as a moment of truth that capture[s] the horror of war and its effects on innocent victims." Later, Facebook reversed their deletion of the "iconic" photograph after public outrage and negative headlines, stating that the image would be available for sharing and that "[Facebook is] always looking to improve our policies to make sure they both promote free expression and keep our community safe."

In 2018, Instagram removed a post from @lgbt_history featuring Zoe Leonard's 1992 text-based artwork I want a president, which was inspired by the author Eileen Myles' run for president and written at the height of the AIDS epidemic. It reads, in part:

> *I want a person with AIDS for president and I want a fag for vice president and I want someone with no health insurance and I want someone who grew up in a place where the earth is so saturated with toxic waste that they didn't have a choice about getting leukemia.*

In response to Instagram's censorship of the work, Washington, D.C. couple Leighton Brown and Matthew Riemer, who run the @lgbt_history account, asked their followers to share the work, filling Instagram with hundreds of posts of Leonard's poetry. While not all of those posts were deleted, those censored for participating included the chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, who was in the process of planning a retrospective of Leonard's work. For three days following public outcry over

the blatant art censorship occurring on its platform, Instagram's only comment was that they were “looking into it.” By the end of the week, however, the company announced through a spokesperson that the content “was taken down by mistake, and has since been restored."

In 2021, Instagram removed a movie poster from its platform which advertised Madres Paralelas (Parallel Mothers), an Oscar-nominated film from the legendary Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar. Designed by Javier Jaén, the poster depicts a black-and-white image of a lactating nipple, designed to look like a crying eye. Set against a popping red background with bold pink text in all-caps, the nipple is integral to what is clearly a work of art — a movie poster whose central purpose is to suggest the emotionally complicated nature of motherhood. Jaén remarked:

> *This is probably the first image I saw when I was born. A company like Instagram tells me my work is dangerous, that people shouldn’t see it, that it’s pornographic. How many people are they telling that their body is bad, that their body is dangerous? They say their technology can’t differentiate the context. I don’t care. Change your technology then.*

Following extensive public criticism of the decision to censor the artwork, Instagram reversed course and allowed the poster to be displayed on its platform. To the press, the company stated that they “make exceptions to allow nudity in certain circumstances, which includes when there’s clear artistic context. We’ve therefore restored posts sharing the Almodóvar movie poster to Instagram […].” Although Instagram's final decision acknowledged the need for a kind of exception for content that has "clear artistic context," in terms of lens-based works, the company notably seems to only apply this exception to well-known work such as Almodóvar's.

Progress on the Platforms

Despite the fact that the nude has been a central part of artistic expression since before the beginning of recorded human history, artist-activists and advocacy groups have had to defend its place on social media platforms. We’ve had to strategize to safeguard the expressive freedom of artists and creators at times when social media companies were

resistant to prioritize artists' interests over other concerns. Substantial achievements have been made on this front.

In 2018, in response to the Paris high court's ruling over Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, Facebook modified its policies on nudity. Although Instagram and its then-parent company Facebook both maintained their ban on photographic representations of the naked body, their policies shifted to formally allow artistic nudity in sculpture and painting. Practically speaking, of course, the company continued to censor — the Venus of Willendorf post removal that year standing out as a prominent example of their persistent censorship of artwork, policy pivots notwithstanding. Complicating the issue, the enforcement of Community Standards violations is largely delegated to algorithmic review, so mistakes happen, accentuated by the biases of the algorithms.

In 2019, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) held an art action called #WeTheNipple at Facebook's NYC Headquarters. The group collaborated with artist-activist Spencer Tunick, who staged a photographic artwork of 125 people posing nude in Astor Place, just outside of Facebook's offices. Participants covered their nipples and genitalia with 10 inch printed circular cards of photographed male nipples to underscore the gender inequality in existing nudity policies. The stickers' images included contributions from Bravo's Andy Cohen, artist Andres Serrano, actor-photographer Adam Goldberg, Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith, Whitney Biennial featured artist Paul Mpagi Sepuya, and Tunick himself.

The #WeTheNipple campaign called on Facebook and Instagram to allow photographic artistic nudity on their platforms. NCAC wrote an open letter to Facebook asking the company to convene a group of stakeholders in the arts to inform the development of new guidelines for artistic context. Three days after the art action took place, Facebook agreed, committing to revisit their policies and to convene a group of artists, art educators, museum curators, activists, and Facebook employees to examine how to better serve artists. NCAC collaborated with Facebook to convene the group, and participants discussed the issue of nude photographic art and the harm done to artists under existing policies, provided insights into the challenges Facebook has faced in developing its nudity policy, and workshopped ideas to move forward.

Following the success of the #WeTheNipple campaign, in 2020 NCAC's Art & Culture Advocacy Program convened human rights organizations, art collectors, and artist-activists to form Don't Delete Art (DDA), a project aimed at drawing attention to the damage done when social media companies censor art, and to work towards greater protection of artistic expression across platforms. DDA's Gallery gives visibility to the types of work that typically gets suppressed, its Resources provide tips for complying with community guidelines, and its Newsletters offer analysis of developments in the field.

In 2020, Facebook also announced the implementation of the Oversight Board, opening up a new avenue for users to appeal their post removals, even after exhausting community guidelines appeals. The same year, the Oversight Board heard its first appeal focused on nudity in images shared on Instagram. The offending content featured images of uncovered female nipples as well as images of female breasts in which the nipple was covered or cropped out — all of which were removed by an automated system enforcing Facebook's community standard against posts showing "adult nudity and sexual activity." The Oversight Board overturned Facebook's original decision on the grounds that the content was allowed under a policy exception for "breast cancer awareness." Importantly, they recommended the company improve its transparency by notifying users when algorithms are used to moderate their posts and allowing users to appeal automated moderation with a human being. They also advised improved detection of images with text-overlay to better "read" posts addressing breast cancer awareness. Finally, the Oversight Board encouraged the company to revise its community guidelines to specify that female nipples can be shown in the context of raising breast cancer awareness and work to ensure greater consistency between Instagram and Facebook's community guidelines.

In 2022, following pressure from DDA and other activist groups, Facebook, rebranded as Meta, introduced greater transparency around recommendations guidelines and violation notifications on Instagram. Notably, it improved users' ability to appeal these "violations" decisions, too. Instagram began to offer a new "Account Status" page — which provides creators with information about how "in danger" their account is based on its past and present violations. Instagram also added greater clarity to their policies in regards to what constitutes "sexual solicitation," which was encouraging given that those rules are often deployed to justify the removal of legitimate artistic content.

In 2023, we are still pushing for further progress. Artists still do not have a way to appeal downrankings as related to hashtags; the appeals system for recommendations guidelines violations doesn't let account holders know the extent to which their post history places them at risk; the difference between account downranking vs. post downranking is vague; the nude body in lens-based works is still treated as inherently sexual; and there is still no further explanation as to how a post with lens-based nudity can demonstrate "clear artistic context" as Instagram described in the de-censored Almodóvar/Jaén image. For social media policies to be properly inclusive and supportive of artistic expression, arts communities must be consulted in policy development and enforcement processes.

Conclusion

As artists continue to fight for artistic freedoms online and advocacy groups encourage social media behemoths to act responsibly in providing the public forum they claim to foster, it is important that we both recognize our victories and the work which lies ahead.

Instagram's 2019 censorship of Betty Tompkins' work was a wake-up call for many members of the arts community. Tompkins, whose work — photorealistic close-up paintings of both heterosexual and homosexual intimate acts — had been censored by French customs officers in 1973, and in Japan in 2006, commented on the turn censorship took when Instagram deleted her account. "It is a particularly misogynistic direction. Instagram right now looks like the 1950s, when you couldn't express anything."

Fortunately, since then, some things have changed. But when it comes to female and LGBTQ+ nudity, especially in photography or lens-based artwork, much — if not all — remains the same. The DDA Gallery of art censored online illustrates the work that still lies ahead. But there is hope.

In early 2023, Meta's Oversight Board published a decision that implicated the platform's handling of what is perhaps the most common cause of censorship: nude depictions of bare female or LGBTQ+ chests. In the second appeal it has heard focused on nudity in images shared on Instagram, the Oversight Board announced a reversal of "Meta's original decisions to remove two Instagram posts depicting transgender and non-binary people with bare chests." In their written recommendations, the Oversight

Board called for Meta to overhaul their nudity policies and ensure that their content moderation policies respected fundamental human rights — such as equal treatment of protected classes and freedom of expression. Meta has committed to "implement in part" the recommendations of the Oversight Board.

Three decades have passed since the creation of the internet, and its initial promises of a more egalitarian, democratic, and open forum for human expression often seem like a distant memory. Internet freedom is on the decline, both in the United States and globally. Wavering at the first hint of controversy, many social media executives seem to prefer freedom from discomfort to freedom of expression. Others indolently favor the simplicity and ease of overbroad content moderation policies to investing in the nuanced sort of policy development that would enable greater artistic expression. Since more complex policies require more time and greater manpower to enforce, there is economic incentive for social media rule-makers to avoid making changes. Despite this, pressure from artist-activists, advocacy groups, and the public has successfully moved social media companies to make limited policy revisions. Nonprofit and government investments in human-centric technologies have also picked up some slack from social media leaders' intransigence. Just this summer, the ELLIS Alicante Foundation joined forces with DDA to steward the development of human-centric Artificial Intelligence in the context of protecting artistic expression online.

Those of us who care about the history of art must keep faith; censorial regimes eventually crumble, because humanity is simply too difficult to contain and repress indefinitely. The human spirit is resilient, but free expression is vulnerable. If the artistic nude continues to be repressed, we risk cutting off artists from their noblest lineage. From prehistory to the classical period and its many revivals, the human body as an artistic subject has long been a site to celebrate ourselves, explore our origins, and revel in our strength and mystery. A society which censors its own humanity risks losing it altogether.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Nov 29, 2023)

Originally published August 14, 2023 on the Don't Delete Art blog (linked here)

The New Kronstadt — A Manifesto

A "Think Piece" article

A specter is haunting America: free expression. Interest groups from across American culture have entered into an unholy alliance to exorcize this specter. Beginning in the 1980s, Evangelical Christians joined hands with anti-porn Feminists. Today, professedly radical activists police new orthodoxies while old-school conformists seek to reverse the cultural transformations brought by American social justice movements beginning in the 1960s — both using the same methods. Meanwhile, risk-averse publishing executives and self-censoring leaders of higher education work to sanitize the learning process — under pressure from aggressive stakeholders and a 24/7 news cycle of public outrage fueled by social media.

Nowhere in this picture does it become clear that government involvement is necessary for a culture of self-censorship to take root in America. The signs are everywhere that we are silencing ourselves through our private cultural institutions, sometimes without any coercive obligation or directive to do so from our government.

Censorship does not only come directly from the public institutions that one would expect. Rather, censorship is sometimes self-imposed by private citizens and their own private organizations. Yet censorship's insidious harms remain intact, whether they are imposed by government mandate or private choice. In the United States today, there is a general recognition of the government's proper role in allowing free speech, but unfortunately, private citizens and organizations regularly demonstrate disregard for the values which animate the First Amendment: values which proclaim openness to dissent and tolerance of differing opinions to be indispensable to the progress of our society. Free speech is valuable outside of governmental contexts, and by limiting our critical attention only to situations where the First Amendment directly applies, we demonstrate a lack of commitment to building an open society. The current free speech crisis at Haverford College, where students and administrators have chosen to perpetuate a culture of self-censorship unto themselves, is reflective of a national culture which no longer values free expression.

The situation is perhaps most visible on college and university campuses — microcosms of American society writ large — where there is no shortage of worrying recent developments. Last school year, a committee at the University of Tennessee voted to expel pharmacology student Kimberly Diei. Her offense? Tweeting "crude" Cardi B lyrics and sharing "vulgar" sex-positive opinions on Twitter. Last spring, writing professor Aneil Rallin received notice that he would be investigated by his university for misconduct. His offense? Assigning his students provocative writings by black and queer authors which his administration termed "deviant pornography" and "triggering." Meanwhile, at Collin College, a McCarthyist purge of left-wing professors has swept through campus over the past few years.

Yet such trends are not limited to college and university campuses. Over the summer, social democrat Ruy Teixeira announced his departure from the Center for American Progress on the grounds that the organization's adherence to new social justice orthodoxies created a chilled speech environment unsupportive of his class-centric/class-conscious research, which foregrounded economic disadvantage rather than focusing specifically on matters of race. In the midst of America's summer of racial reckoning in 2020, David Shor, a progressive Democratic pollster, was fired over backlash to one of his tweets, which had suggested that non-violent protests would be more electorally beneficial to left-wing political candidates than violent protests. That same summer, a utility company worker named Emmanuel Cafferty was fired for hanging his left hand out of the window of his pickup truck, since another driver interpreted his hand placement to connote a white supremacist gesture.

These are the stories which often lie forgotten by the public in the shuffle of today's culture wars, where free speech is routinely miscast as nothing more than a conservative talking point and where few leftists acknowledge that an anti-free-speech culture harms the very people the left claims to champion. If the political left is to keep its voice, it must renew its historically unequivocal support for a free speech culture in America, and it must reaffirm protections even for speech which we find abhorrent. As Noam Chomsky has said, "if we don't believe in freedom of speech for those we despise, we don't believe in it at all." Conformists who seek to enforce a party line must be challenged by those who seek to build an authentic and open political left.

As the left adopts anti-free-speech positions under the banner of increasingly-stringent morality codes, we limit our own voices and hand over precedent for those on the right to play the same game but with more nefarious intentions. “Don’t Say Gay” and “Anti-CRT” laws are the price we pay for normalizing a culture of censorship. As such, it is time we stop entrusting our social goals to careerist bureaucrats (nomenklatura equivalents) who merely provide aesthetic solutions — like speech codes — to substantive social problems. At schools like Haverford, this means rejecting paternalistic intrusions into student life from administrators and repealing repressive, student-written social rules which dictate what can and can’t be said on campus.

There is nothing radical or revolutionary about speech codes: they are neo-Victorian tools of repression which enforce upper-class norms of politeness and conformity. Censorious “cancel culture” inquisitions advance no authentically left-wing cause and have victimized working-class janitors at Smith College and Notre Dame, who were fired and investigated, respectively, for upsetting the easily-offended private school students on their campuses.

By decimating a culture of free speech and embracing the technology of auto-totality which Václav Havel warned about in the 1970s, the left of today is constructing its own sepulcher and paving the way for totalitarianism by creating a culture of individuals who are willing to accept the loss of their individual freedoms. The contemporary left must re-awaken to the long history of socialist objections to centralization, bureaucracy, and excessive statism — critiques which have historically targeted speech codes and restrictions on expression — and which formed the intellectual basis of the Kronstadt Rebellion.

As with the Kronstadt Rebellion of the 1920s and the "Kronstadt moments" experienced by left-wing intellectuals who defected from communism in the 1940s and 1950s, the left of today must loudly correct course from within. This publication is modeled after *The God That Failed*, which chronicled the “Kronstadt moments” experienced by Louis Fischer, André Gide, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender, and Richard Wright through a series of personal essays. It seeks to apply a similar strain of thought to today’s distinct political moment.

Writing in the name of the “Kronstadt” today means focusing on the impact that overzealous culture warriors have on working-class and middle-class Americans. It

means acknowledging the decline in expressive freedoms that our own political allies are bringing about. It means suspicion of centralized, universal norms imposed from above and celebration of community, individuality, and local autonomy. And most importantly, it requires looking at ourselves and our perpetuation of a silent society when we choose self-censorship over self-expression.

New, publicly-shared “Kronstadt moments” whose narratives explain why we must stand against the auto-totality, groupthink, and conformism present in today’s culture of censorship are desperately needed in order to provoke a sea change in the spirit of the Kronstadt’s Petropavlovsk resolution calling for freedom of speech, press, and association on the left. What better place for the revolution to begin than the progressive panacea of Haverford College?

— William Harris ‘24, for The New Kronstadt (Apr 4, 2023)

Sounding the FIRE alarm at Haverford College — FIRE Campus Scholar launches online publication

A "Think Piece" article

The Haverford College community has a proud history of supporting free speech. Steven Pico, the lead plaintiff in the Supreme Court book-banning case *Island Trees School District v. Pico*, is among the school's alumni. Cornel West, who once taught at Haverford as a visiting professor and received an honorary degree from the college, has emphasized the importance of free speech to achieving social justice throughout his career. In the 1960s, Haverford students even participated in the Free Speech Movement with support from the school administration, who sponsored buses to transport anti-Vietnam War protesters around the country.

Free speech — the right to express one's opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation — is a fundamental human right. It is essential for the growth and development of individuals and for the betterment of society. It is also necessary to the pursuit of truth and is the cornerstone of any liberal arts education. However, despite its proud history at my school, it is clear that free speech is not fully valued at Haverford College today.

As a FIRE Campus Scholar, I spent the past semester reaching out to the Haverford community to learn more about student, faculty, staff, and alumni experiences with free speech on campus. Supported by FIRE, I created The New Kronstadt, an online publication dedicated to exploring the connection between free speech and social progress through historical anecdotes and personal narratives written by members of the Haverford community. The publication details how free speech is currently under attack at Haverford and beyond.

The New Kronstadt takes its name from the Kronstadt Rebellion, a historic event in which leftist sailors in the early Soviet Union demanded freedom of speech, press, and association. The rebellion was brutally suppressed by the Bolshevik government, highlighting the dangers of political uniformity as imposed by some leftists onto others. The New Kronstadt seeks to bring attention to this important history and inspire others to echo the sailors' spirited demands for pluralism and political freedom. True social

progress does not mimic past inquisitions and purges, and we need a renewed commitment to liberal democratic values on the American left — particularly when it comes to freedom of speech. The New Kronstadt aims to facilitate these conversations and promote more inclusive and open expressive environments, beginning with the community that its contributors are part of as Haverfordians.

The stories Haverford students, faculty, staff, and alumni described to me are shocking. They demonstrate a serious problem at the college, the extent of which has not been made public until now. Thanks to those who felt comfortable writing publicly on such topics, The New Kronstadt offers evidence of Haverford's free speech crisis, an issue that continues to go publicly unacknowledged and unaddressed by both administrators and the school's board of trustees.

Significantly, most of the individuals with whom I spoke over the course of the semester ultimately *chose to remain silent*, afraid of the consequences of being publicly associated with their stories. In light of the anecdotes provided in my contributors' articles, this comes as no surprise.

Haverford's current culture of self-censorship

Students at Haverford have faced intimidation, bullying, and harassment for expressing dissenting views or holding views that differ from the majority — or even a plurality — of the campus community. These incidents have included students incurring removal from extracurricular activities and threats to their physical safety, articles blacklisted from being published in school newspapers, and questions disallowed from being asked to visiting speakers. Such happenings have stifled the open exchange of ideas and hindered the growth and learning of the community.

Some students at Haverford assume that a culture of self-censorship, as encouraged by the student-run Honor Code, achieves the progressive social and political ends that they desire. Yet, as a case study, Haverford proves that free speech on campus isn't merely a conservative issue. In fact, the numbers suggest that a majority of left-wing students at Haverford self-censor due to the repressive ideological atmosphere on campus. According to data from FIRE's College Free Speech Rankings, Haverford has seven liberal students for every one conservative student. Yet despite this political homogeneity, 58% of Haverford students say they self-censor, and 77% of Haverford

students report anxiety over speaking their minds freely, even in the classroom. For Haverfordians who care about social justice and education, this fact should be alarming. We cannot achieve solidarity, let alone progress and learning, without dialogue.

As Jacob Gaba writes in his article for The New Kronstadt, “Without nuanced discussion and debate, and without robust academic freedom, little learning can be accomplished. Our institutions become bastions for indoctrination.” Nick Lasinsky also highlights a culture of intolerance towards those who do not fully support certain movements or ideas on campus. He encourages Haverfordians to reverse this negative culture, writing:

> *The world is better when we embrace the humility of uncertainty—when we are willing to listen to others, debate them, work to understand them—no matter how immovable our current beliefs feel. This is a fundamental step in any journey to understanding a topic, and a fundamental step of education.*

What Gaba and Lasinsky describe should be common sense at one of the top 20 liberal arts colleges in the nation. After all, their words describe fundamental building blocks of the learning process: epistemic humility and Socratic dialogue. Sadly, a belief in pluralism seems all too rare at Haverford. According to the College Free Speech Rankings, only 25% of students at Haverford say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is never acceptable. Fittingly, Haverford students in 2014 canceled their own commencement speaker, reflecting the school culture’s hostility to dissenting opinions.

In such a repressive speech environment, some students and alumni recognize the necessity of speaking out. As Trevor Stern writes, “I felt called to action. The stifling atmosphere had to be broken apart, and I could think of only one way to do this: public dissent.”

Rebuilding a free speech culture at Haverford

Public pleas for the college to finally take the free speech crisis on its campus seriously must not go ignored. It is crucial that Haverford College takes steps to address the issue of free speech on its campus in order to create a welcoming and inclusive community that values and respects the diverse viewpoints of all its members.

With reflection and resolution for 2023, Haverford College must revitalize its community by making free speech a clearly-articulated institutional priority. This involves adopting and promoting clear policies and guidelines that protect free speech (such as a version of the Chicago Statement), supporting individuals who face censorship, and engaging in ongoing dialogue and education about the importance of free speech. Concrete steps can include training for students and faculty and taking action against those who seek to suppress or intimidate others.

Haverford College should also be transparent about where it may be falling short in terms of supporting free speech. Administrators should actively acknowledge past incidents or controversies related to free speech, and take steps to learn from them and systematically correct the institutional errors made. Haverford claims trust, concern, and respect as its central values — but we have no trust if we cannot even speak to one another openly. By being honest about past mistakes, the college can foster a culture of mutual respect and dialogue among its community members.

One of Haverford's early presidents, Isaac Sharpless, offered these inspiring words to the graduating class of 1888:

> *I suggest that you preach Truth and do Righteousness as you have been taught, whereinsoever that Teaching may commend itself to your Consciences and your Judgements. For your Consciences and your Judgements we have not sought to bind; and see you to it that no other Institution, no political Party, no social Circle, no Religious Organizations, no pet Ambitions put such chains on you as would tempt you to sacrifice one Iota of the Moral Freedom of your Consciences or the Intellectual Freedom of your Judgements.*

Haverford can still live up to these words. In choosing to prioritize free speech once again, the college can not only fulfill its mission as a liberal arts institution, but also set an example for other schools and communities on how to recognize, safeguard, and promote a fundamental community value when it is threatened, undermined, and at risk of being lost.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Jan 21, 2023)

Originally published January 20, 2023 on FIRE's Newsdesk (linked here)

Haverford Students Demand Free Speech Protections, Prompting Questions About Specifics

A "Think Piece" article

As the Haverford College community continues to grapple with the Israel-Hamas conflict, the hateful act of violence perpetrated against one of our own in Burlington, Vermont over the weekend has prompted Students' Council and a new student-activist group named "Students for Peace" to organize a formal document with demands of the Haverford administration. One of these demands calls for "Admin Support for Faculty and Student Freedom of Speech," a necessary call to action after administrators at Bryn Mawr alluded to the use of Honor Trials against student-activists earlier this semester.

Student-activists' recognition of Haverford's lack of free speech culture is well-placed. Indeed, Haverford is desperately in need of reform when it comes to academic freedom and expressive liberties on campus. In September, Haverford ranked among the lowest institutions of higher learning in the country for free speech, placing 208th out of 248 surveyed schools.

As Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) President Greg Lukianoff wrote in *The Atlantic* this week, "The recent censoring of speech on campus is part of a trend that began long before the Israel-Hamas war."

Delving into the fine print of the demands, however, raises questions about what specifically is being requested under the banner of free speech. Do the demands offer a genuine call for universally-bolstered free speech protections for faculty, staff and students? Or, do they advocate for what Nat Hentoff memorably termed "Free Speech for Me–But Not for Thee"?

The demands provide a list of specific ways in which free speech should be supported, prefaced by the statement: "We demand Haverford ensure full protection for faculty and students who speak out about their positions related to the injustice in Palestine in the following ways . . ."

Many of the enumerated proposals that follow would be universal advances for the expressive rights of Haverford community members. The demands ask that Haverford

provide “an information session with legal advisors available to students to provide transparency on their protections when it comes to freedom of speech and student activism in the United States so that students have the tools needed to be safely involved in activism on and off campus.”

In addition, they request that Haverford “provide legal support regarding freedom of speech for faculty and staff upon request.” These are laudable initiatives which an institution committed to elevating free expression might enact. If Haverford were to accept these enumerated demands, it would build on the school’s proud history of supporting student protesters amidst the Vietnam War.

Yet many of the other enumerated demands are troublesome, since they appear to advocate for enhancements to the free speech protections of some — but not all — community members. Speech protections which are not universal, and which discriminate based on viewpoint, are not protections of free speech at all.

One of the specific ways in which the demands ask that free speech be bolstered at Haverford is an explicit recognition that “academic freedom and freedom of speech includes the guaranteed right to speak about the current aggression on Gaza and its broader historical context.” At a time when many voices are being suppressed for doing just that, this is surely warranted. Those who wish to criticize Israel should certainly have the right to do so.

Yet I wonder about what the fine print leaves out. There is no mention of a guarantee for those who would like to channel their expression towards the defense of Israel. Do the writers of these demands — who claim to support free speech, a universal principle, and who represent the entire student body on Students’ Council — also seek equal protections for community members who wish to speak out about Hamas and other terrorist organizations’ aggression on Israel? This would surely be warranted, too. Earlier this month, a professor at the University of Southern California was punished for expressing anti-Hamas sentiments. Earlier this year, Duke University denied pro-Israel students’ expressive and associational rights until FIRE intervened.

Likewise, the demands ask administrators to “commit to a policy that ensures that future consideration for tenure-track faculty will not be negatively impacted for speaking up against the apartheid in Palestine, including no financial retributions.” Academic

freedom should indeed protect professors who take a stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict, but it is concerning that the demands only ask for one particular stance to be protected. Academic freedom is a two-way street, and policy protections should apply universally, irrespective of viewpoint, since political winds shift constantly, and what is popular speech today may be unpopular tomorrow.

The demands' professed promotion of freedom of speech is further undercut by its request, separate from its enumerated free speech proposals, that Haverford take a formal political stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Specifically, the demands ask for "a statement from the College recognizing the State of Israel as responsible for the Apartheid in Palestine." If Haverford were to formally adopt this political position, it would cast a chilling effect upon the expression of opposing viewpoints on campus.

As the University of Chicago's "Kalven Report" states, when institutions of higher learning are functioning most effectively to support academic freedom, they are "the home and sponsor of critics," *not* the critic itself.

The organizational sponsors of these demands are Students' Council and the vaguely-named "Students for Peace" group, not Students for Justice in Palestine. Students' Council has a mandate to represent the student body as a whole, while "Students for Peace" claims principles of free speech and academic freedom as central to its objectives. Both organizations should live up to those foundational values by protecting expression across viewpoints rather than only seeking speech protections for some. The question remains: are these demands in support of robust and pluralistic discourse on campus, or are they only in support of the robust expression of a select viewpoint?

Perhaps my question will be resolved by future, even-handed edits to the recently-drafted demands that will ensure they reflect a genuine desire for everyone to speak freely, rather than only some. Yet if the omissions I have highlighted are intentional, then student-activists are committing a short-sighted mistake.

It is a strategic error to condone the censorship of your political opposite while carving out exceptions for yourself. Former American Civil Liberties Union director Ira Glasser described this point well: "Speech restrictions are like poison gas. It seems like it's a

great weapon to have when you've got the poison gas in your hands . . . but the wind has a way of shifting . . . and suddenly that poison gas is being blown back on you."

If student-activists are serious about creating a culture of free speech at Haverford, then they might consider petitioning the administration to adopt a version of the Chicago Statement, which "guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn."

Furthermore, we as a student body — no admin initiative necessary — could also take it upon ourselves to revise what is perhaps our community's most censorious policy: the Honor Code. When Bryn Mawr administrators threatened student-activists with an Honor Trial earlier this semester, it was a harbinger of the Honor Code's censorious potential. Although the Deans had no authority to initiate a student-led process, there is nothing preventing students from bringing protesters before the Honor Council for offending their political views. This is troublesome. If you build structures of censorship to punish opinions you disagree with, they will inevitably be used to censor opinions you do agree with.

I ask that we show the courage and compassion to allow those other from us to speak and to be heard. Haverford's campus culture is prone to dogmatic rigidity, a false omnipotence which assumes the loudest opinion to be just and correct and everyone else's to be wrong. Yet life is complex. Free speech can allow us to discover nuance. Let us acknowledge our differences, the ambiguities of the world, and our common humanity, openly, and in conversation.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Nov 30, 2023)

Originally published November 30, 2023 in The Bi-College News (linked here)

Haverford College earns national ranking of #208 for free speech

A "Think Piece" article

In September, Haverford College ranked among the lowest institutions of higher learning in the country for free speech, placing 208th out of 248 surveyed schools, according to the 2024 Free Speech Rankings, which are administered by College Pulse and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE). For a school ranked 18th among "National Liberal Arts Colleges" by U.S. News & World Report, Haverford's low ranking for free speech is embarrassing. As a senior at Haverford, I have been disappointed in the lack of administrative action on the issue throughout my four years here.

The survey, which is in its fourth year, compiled student opinions on relevant school policies, the campus speech climate, and personal comfort expressing ideas. A Haverford junior wrote, "The whole campus is just one big hive mind where you either subscribe to certain beliefs or be ostracized/canceled." Another student said, "Something as simple as believing that law enforcement shouldn't be completely abolished is something I don't feel comfortable expressing."

Although Haverford leans left politically, with 13.4 liberal students for every conservative, 55% of Haverford students say they self-censor and 70% of Haverford students report anxiety over having their words misunderstood. The numbers suggest that a majority of left-leaning students at Haverford self-censor due to the repressive ideological atmosphere on campus.

To those familiar with the history of free speech at Haverford, these alarming statistics are perhaps more confounding than anything else.

Haverford used to be a leader among its peers for its celebration and active encouragement of free expression. The college once promoted 1st Amendment principles by financially-sponsoring transportation for student protests against the Vietnam War at a time when such protests were considered controversial. Among Haverford's alumni are the sole appellant in American history to have challenged

book-banning at The Supreme Court and notable civil liberties attorneys. Meanwhile, the faculty has included such figures as the renowned social justice advocate Cornel West, who recently wrote a public statement on the importance of freedom of thought and expression in collaboration with conservative scholar Robert P. George.

Free speech is currently undervalued at Haverford

Today, many of my peers at Haverford may view free speech as nothing more than a conservative talking point. I disagree. Free speech is not a right-wing or left-wing issue; it is a human right, and I think we all lose when policy protections and cultural support for freedom of expression erode. If left-leaning students like myself want to criticize book-banning, homophobic speech restrictions, and racist "divisive concept" curriculum bans across the country, we cannot simultaneously restrict free speech for those who don't toe the party line at Haverford, lest we be hypocritical and complicit in normalizing a culture of censorship in our own backyard.

The Haverford administration is not oblivious to the school's free speech problem. President Wendy Raymond, in a letter to the campus community on June 13, 2021, admitted that our campus speech code might cause "a reasonable person" to "worry about whether they are free to share their views, whether a political affiliation, a stance on public policy, or a religious value at odds with others." This school year, Athletics Director Danielle Lynch announced during an NCAA regulatory meeting that "eliminating cancel culture" would be among her goals. Yet progress, on both an administrative and interpersonal level, remains to be seen. Policies which restrict speech remain unchanged.

Today's "kindly inquisitors" who perpetuate Haverford's speech restrictions claim the advancement of social justice as their motive. As a gay man, I understand the temptation to wield censorial power with well-seeming intentions. I have been called a "faggot" many times — most recently by a hostile passerby on the street in New York while holding my boyfriend's hand — and I understand the cutting manner in which words can be painful or shocking. It is true that speech can feel harmful. That is because speech is incredibly powerful.

Yet it is precisely because speech is powerful that we must aggressively protect and promote a culture which celebrates, invites, and encourages free expression. Our ability

to speak and write freely forms the cornerstone of our capacity to liberate, educate, and realize progress. In the words of one gay legal scholar, Dale Carpenter, “The First Amendment created gay America.” After all, the first gay organizations, politicians, newspapers, websites — and more — would have been censored out of existence in the absence of a strong First Amendment, which shielded early gay organizing efforts at a time when most of the country supported the outright criminalization of homosexuality.

If we are to transcend the imperfections of our present reality, we must be able to utter that which the status quo of society considers distasteful or even offensive. The notion of progress is itself a provocation. The concept of gay marriage once offended many; now it is law.

Rather than viewing campus censorship as a form of solidarity, I view it with skepticism. The situation in Florida makes it clear that free speech is what enables spaces where minorities can talk about race and sex openly. So, I must disagree when some on campus play the same nefarious game as DeSantis and limit our discussions of race and sex, among other topics, by electing to silence political opponents through speech codes and cancellation rather than engaging in open discourse.

If we want to live in a society which honors our words and identities, then the way we must win is not by banning our opposition, but by proving them wrong intellectually, beating them in elections, and taking them to court when our civil rights and civil liberties are violated. Most importantly, we can choose self-expression over self-censorship in our daily lives, and speak out on the issues which matter to us.

I have encouraged free speech at Haverford by launching The New Kronstadt to focus on issues of expression on campus, and I invite my fellow students to let your life speak in the Quaker tradition. I ask that Haverford’s administrators not abdicate their responsibility — as stewards of higher learning — to protect academic freedom, which should be at the vanguard of any intellectual project. It takes work to build a culture of free expression, but I believe in our community, and I think we are up to the challenge.

How to rebuild a free speech culture at Haverford

After my sophomore year of college, I interned at FIRE and learned how colleges can overcome the challenge of an entrenched culture of censorship. FIRE has seen success

adopting the Chicago Statement at small, liberal arts colleges where there has been significant community engagement and buy-in. Haverford can renew a culture of free expression on campus by adopting the Chicago Statement or drafting a version of it which corresponds more closely to its unique values and eccentricities.

Haverford prides itself on its close-knit community which values input from all constituencies and emphasizes student agency. Examples of institutions making the Chicago Statement adoption process a true community effort abound. Gettysburg College, for example, adopted its version of the Chicago Statement after lively panel discussions and a year-long process of drafting and deliberation by students, faculty, and the administration. The final statement was affirmed by the student and faculty governing bodies and approved by the board of trustees. This extent of community buy-in has only been replicated by three other institutions, according to FIRE: Brandeis University, Colgate University, and Utica College.

Haverford places a strong emphasis on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) — and this provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how social justice and free speech can go hand-in-hand. Haverford should consider drawing on DePauw University's Statement on Freedom of Expression, which was adopted a few years ago. A private institution like Haverford, DePauw's leadership involved many constituencies in the drafting process and highlighted the university's deep dedication to DEI without undercutting its commitment to free expression. This was a careful balance, but the statement turned out strong and represents the university's priorities well: free expression and diversity — not one at the expense of the other. I believe this dual emphasis would be appealing to the Haverford community. Like Haverford, DePauw was also motivated by a low ranking in the Free Speech Rankings — they were dead last among the 55 schools surveyed in FIRE's 2020 analysis.

Haverford's free speech ranking is currently low, but we don't have to accept this as permanent. By making policy changes, Haverford can join a growing chorus of institutions of higher learning who recognize that free speech is at the heart of education and essential to cultivating a diverse community. It is on all of us to ensure that our lives can, and do, speak.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Nov 10, 2023)

Amidst Israel-Hamas War, Protecting Free Speech is as Important as Ever

A "Think Piece" article

Across the country, students who attempt to express their opinions about the Israel-Palestine conflict are finding themselves punished for their speech, protests and free association. Examples of stifled expression abound: Brandeis University banned its campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine, while NYU students tore down publicly-posted fliers depicting missing Israeli hostages. As the Israel-Hamas war continues, we have an opportunity to buck the national trend and ensure that viewpoint discrimination, censorship and the heckler's veto have no place at Haverford or Bryn Mawr.

Many students and faculty are making good-faith efforts to engage in dialogue across differences and ensure everyone has an opportunity to learn more about the Israel-Palestine conflict and its associated history. At Haverford, Ally Landau and Kinaan Abdalhamaid hosted a student teach-in just this past week, while Barak Mendelsohn hosted a faculty teach-in days after the October 7th terrorist attacks. According to an email from John McKnight, the Dean of Haverford College, there will be more teach-ins and opportunities for discussion in the weeks ahead that will ensure a variety of perspectives are represented.

Despite the best efforts of some students and faculty to accommodate and engage with speech from all perspectives, student activism within the Bi-Co has been threatened with punishment from the administration. At Bryn Mawr, the Bi-Co Chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine hosted a sit-in outside President Kim Cassidy's office a few weeks ago. In response to the students' chants and posters (which were removed by the administration), Karlene Burrell-McRae, Dean of the Undergraduate College at Bryn Mawr, threatened an Honor Trial. According to The Bi-College News' reporting, Burrell-McRae told the protesters,"You can sit here, but you might be sent to Honor Trial if you hang posters [including the phrase, 'From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free.']"

In this situation, with McCrae posturing herself as the Honor Council's inquisitor-general, student protesters faced the threat of punishment for expression that would be protected by the First Amendment on a public school campus. While the speech in question was undoubtedly controversial, since the American Jewish Congress considers the "from the river to the sea" slogan to be anti-Semitic, it does not cross the boundaries of what the First Amendment allows. In fact, the purpose of the First Amendment is to protect controversial speech. Furthermore, Nadine Strossen, the former president of the ACLU, has argued that the best way to respond to hate is with free speech, not censorship. If student protesters do end up being punished, as the Deans have promised, then Bryn Mawr's stated commitments to free speech and academic freedom would effectively mean nothing.

According to the Bryn Mawr College Self-Government Association Constitution, Honor Trials are based on principles of self-governance, and neither the Deans nor the College as an entity can bring a case to trial since they are not eligible to serve as a confronting party. Given Haverford and Bryn Mawr's emphasis on student agency and self-direction, it is a disturbing incursion on student autonomy for an administrator to claim to speak on behalf of the Honor Council when they have no mandate to do so. Bi-Co community members should reject this paternalistic, heavy-handed attempt to hijack student governing processes to silence student protesters.

There are boundaries, of course, to what the First Amendment protects. The First Amendment does not protect true threats and intimidation, incitement to violence, discriminatory harassment, or the heckler's veto. When speech does not cross those boundaries, however, the First Amendment ensures wide latitude for protesters of all convictions to express their viewpoints, even if that expression is considered by some to be deeply unpopular, offensive, distasteful, or even hateful.

At Haverford and Bryn Mawr, both private schools, administrators and other authorities like the Honor Council are not bound by the First Amendment. However, years of American legal jurisprudence have shaped First Amendment law into a valuable guide for balancing freedom of expression and public safety. It would be an injustice if Haverford and Bryn Mawr students were allowed less expressive autonomy than peers at American public schools who enjoy First Amendment guarantees of political freedom.

Haverford and Bryn Mawr's student bodies are filled with conscientious individuals who care deeply about current events in Israel and Gaza. All of us should be able to speak freely on an issue of such great personal, academic and political importance. If the Honor Code as it stands today means that students are not allowed to engage in controversial political speech, then it is in serious need of revision, especially in light of advertised school policies which promise expressive rights commensurate with the First Amendment.

Haverford's Expressive Freedom and Responsibility Policy promises "the right of all students to engage in discussion, to exchange thought and opinion and to speak or write freely on any subject." There is no Israel-Palestine exception. There is no Honor Council veto.

As a student at a school which prides itself on fostering a community rooted in trust, concern and respect, I believe we should practice those values by allowing our classmates to share their genuinely-held beliefs and supporting their right to engage in political protest, especially when we disagree with them. When we hear something we believe is wrong-headed or hateful, we can engage in counterspeech or counterprotest. What we need is more speech, not less.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Nov 17, 2023)

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Interviews

Barak Mendelsohn, Uncensored: A Campus Conversation

An interview

Barak Mendelsohn is a Professor of Political Science at Haverford College. He specializes in security studies. Recently, he hosted a faculty teach-in after the October 7th terrorist attack in Israel to offer a topical educational opportunity to the campus community.

I've known Professor Mendelsohn for about a year. He was one of the faculty members I spoke to when I was in the fact-finding phase of launching The New Kronstadt and conducting informational interviews with dozens of Haverford College students, alumni, faculty, and staff about their experiences with free expression at Haverford. In recent weeks, Professor Mendelsohn has been enveloped in a maelstrom of controversy both online and on campus.

Following the horrific shooting of Haverford junior Kinnan Abdalhamid, a group of Haverford students released a list of demands, which seek “A statement from the College condemning the state of Israel as responsible for [...] apartheid,” among other controversial proposals. Reminiscent of the campus climate during the fall 2020 strike, many community members have felt trepidation about opposing these demands publicly. But not Professor Mendelsohn. A week ago, he tweeted: “Saddens me to say this but my own academic institution Haverford College has a Jewish problem. Its student body is led by Hamas apologists and tainted by anti-Semitism. If I’m a parent to a Jewish student I will not send them to Haverford College. #AntisemitismOnCampus”

Some of the demand-writers found this tweet insensitive, and accused Professor Mendelsohn of participating in the sort of rhetoric responsible for Kinnan's shooting. This led to heated back-and-forths. Now, students are calling for Professor Mendelsohn to be fired.

In the wake of all this, I sat down with Professor Mendelsohn to seek his unfiltered thoughts on free speech and academic freedom at Haverford College. Here is a lightly-edited transcript of our conversation.

An open letter to the Provost of Haverford College is circulating, and it seeks to have you sanctioned or fired. There are currently 612 signatures. What do you think this means for academic freedom and free speech at Haverford College?

Well, I've seen the petition. It was important for me not to look at the signatures because there might be students there that I might be teaching. Somebody did send me the signature of Josef Mengele that has since been removed. It took a second for that to actually sink in, that the name Josef Mengele was added… that's not actually a student that graduated in 2020. That's just juvenile anti-Semitism.

I mean, 600 people, I don't know the distribution of them, and 600 people saying something, on one hand, is a great sign of speech. On the other hand, it's not so great when the intention is actually to suppress the speech of somebody else, especially somebody that just came out with a statement that people are not happy with.

Can you share more about your statement? What was your Kronstadt moment that prompted you to speak out?

It's really hard to decide where to start.

So just let's say that since October 7th, I've been trying to do my job. I'm an international security scholar studying the Middle East and focusing on terrorism. I'm not some kind of English professor that's only recently decided it's time to speak about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. No, I've been doing my job, which is to provide analysis as nuanced, as unbiased as I possibly can. And I do believe that I can. People that actually know me know I'm critical of everything.

I was, since October 7th, just trying to do my job. Yet I am constantly facing clear evidence that rather than being seen as the scholar that I am, or even as an American, people are seeing me as somebody that was born and raised in Israel and as a Jew. And I guess that to be Israeli, to be an Israeli Jew — that seems to be on campus these days the worst violation that you could have. And I'm not happy with that, with that notion.

I mean, [I've been] getting proposals from leadership, people in leadership positions at Haverford College to add additional voices to my teaching, where I do my job, with my expertise. It is pretty clear that the real issue is that people are so focused on identity politics that they forgot that the college is not a social institution. It's an academic institution designed to produce and disseminate knowledge and to educate. So even when I was the only one that actually took initiative to teach about this, I got lots of crap for that.

You're referring, by taking initiative, to the teach-in that you hosted?

Yes.

But the teach-in ultimately I think was a great success. We didn't even know how many students would come. We went for a small room because, you know, the teach-ins that I did before about Israeli politics drew about 10, 15 students. We had no clue how people would be interested. The decision was just, this is my job, I need to do [it].

Ultimately it went really well. Instead of an hour, it went for two hours. After that I spoke for an additional 45 minutes with different students, including Kinnan Abdulhamid, the student who was shot. We actually found that there is a lot that we agree about, you

know, like our attitude towards the Palestinian Authority. There was a lot that we agreed upon. We had a great conversation.

Then came fall break and then after fall break I went to Swarthmore College to give a talk. And at Swarthmore, there were demonstrations against me. Among those demonstrations, I was accused of complicity, of genocide. I was accused of complicity in the murder of a six-year-old Muslim kid in Chicago about a month ago. I was accused of starting my talk with the events of October 7th rather than the events of 1948 before I even started my talk, which, of course, started in 1948.

Were these — you referred to people demonstrating — were they interrupting your talk? Was it a heckler's veto situation?

Well, yes, but it gets worse.

So, first of all, the talk was scheduled over the summer. I have given talks before at Swarthmore College. My host at Swarthmore is Sa'ed Atshan. He's a Palestinian that embodies intersectionality: gay, Quaker, from Christian origins, pacifist. There is much that we don't agree on, but he's consistent. He's professional. He does his job.

This is the first time that something like this has happened. Before the talk, I was informed that there was likely to be a demonstration and a security presence. The head of security asked if I could accept that, without, you know, saying I'm not going to speak or something like that. And they described what they thought was going to happen. The students will stand up, they will make a speech, and they will do a walkout. To which I said, of course. You know, this is the right to demonstrate. I didn't think it was probably the most effective way to achieve what they wanted, but they were exercising the right to demonstrate.

Before they start, Sa'ed is reminding everyone not to take any pictures, not to take any recordings, because of student requests, fearing they will be doxxed. The students that are going to demonstrate, you can easily identify them because they have COVID-19 masks on their faces. And as they start, one of them starts their long statement, one of the students is immediately taking a video. So, so much for good faith. Then, it's a long accusation and she calls for everybody to leave. Her segment was too long, so the choreography did not work well. There were not that many people demonstrating and so

people were waiting for her to finish the walkout. While she is speaking, they're standing by the door of the hall and she is going on and on. She leaves and I start my talk.

Then, they are unhappy that this did not go as they planned because they wanted everybody to leave… they had called on the audience to leave my talk. But many of the people that were attending were actually adults, not students. Some were locals, some were faculty. Swarthmore College's administration understood the danger here. They sent somebody from the Provost's Office. The head of communications attended that talk, too.

So the protesters exercised their right and they left, but they were not happy with the result. So, 30 minutes after the first interruption, they came back for a second round that they did not plan before. And now there is a much bigger group of people outside the hall, the security sort of standing in the doors, to make sure that nobody tries to get into the room. So in the second round, the bigger group, they brought friends. They are trying shouting and screaming, anything to drown my voice down, but I go on.

As we finish, people are coming down to speak to me, to thank me, to say what happened, to ask questions. Because my talk was mostly informative. I don't come to the class draped with an Israeli flag. No, I'm a scholar.

The part that, one of the things that so pisses me off is that, for 20 years I was building my identity as primarily a scholar. I left Israel over 20 years ago. Being an academic, I'm uprooted. This is part of that profession. I have nationalities, but I don't have that kind of strong identification with any identity marker more than I have with my identity as a scholar and educator.

Suddenly, I'm a Jew. I'm not even an American. I'm an Israeli Jew. I've been put into that box, and suddenly years of work dissolves.

I have three books, I have over 20 articles, my writing was accepted in good places, my writing is always critical, my writing is always critical on all sides. My best piece is about Israel and the messianic right and about how the path dependency process got Israel stuck in a situation where it is beholden by a lobby group that is basically acting in a way that undermines Israeli interests.

I've been vocal and I've been vocal online as well. You know, with the Palestinian communities in area C, I'm calling out Israel's ethnic cleansing of herder Palestinian communities, the area that under Oslo Accords is under Israeli civilian and military control (area B just Israeli security control, A for Palestinian control)... I've been doing that.

I wanted to ask about that actually. I've seen that your public statements and research have included criticisms of Israeli security policy, Netanyahu's leadership, and settlements in the West Bank. So I'm curious, especially with how you're being perceived on campus, how are your views perceived by Israelis?

I'm seen as far-left.

I mean, if I come here and say that we have a problem, — if I'm supposed to be the natural ally for those that are supporting the Palestinian cause — to find yourself in the front of such a fight… we have a problem.

I'm not somebody that emphasized my Zionist Israeli identity. And I'm an American citizen now. And most of all, I'm a scholar. So that just outrages me. And to see that coming also from the leadership of Haverford College, again using that common, passive-aggressive tone, which abuses Quaker thinking in an instrumental way rather than actually buying into those Quaker notions. I just see that hypocrisy. And I have got to call it out.

But, I want to finish the story with Swarthmore.

Please do.

So I'm trying to come and try to speak. But I see that my host is saying: we have to start going, we were supposed to have dinner at the Swarthmore Inn. And I don't understand why he's saying that, but I'm starting to go.

But as we go down the stairs, he and the head of security say, you actually, you gotta go fast. We have a cart waiting for you outside because the student mob is waiting to chase you. Now, I'm a proud Jew, and I would not run away. So I *walked* to that cart. I mean, the whole situation was just so surreal: being ushered out in a cart. When I was sitting in that cart, the first demonstrator rushing in my direction was a foot away from me.

That was part of my experience there. But as I said, the person from the Provost's Office came and said, "we're sorry, that was not a good look on us." Then, when I was sitting in [the] Swarthmore Inn, the head of communications brought the Swarthmore College president to come and thank me and Sa'ed for what we are doing and admitting that what happened that day was not a good look for Swarthmore. And I appreciated that. I understand the difficulties that colleges do have as they need to balance hate and free speech. And so I did appreciate that she took it seriously, that she actually made an effort to reach out to me.

The first time that anybody from Haverford's administration reached out to me in a positive way since October 7 was the day after Swarthmore did, when the provost heard from the Swarthmore president about what happened to me at Swarthmore. That was the only time that I got any kind of positive message from our administration.

What do you think about the demands?

I'll be the first one to admit there is a significant rise in both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. And both must be fought. So Kinnan is shot and of course students who are affected by that. And [then] the students started their list of demands.

Now if the students just wrote a piece against hate and support for students who were victims of a hate crime, almost everybody on campus [would have signed it]. You wouldn't have the number of signatures you currently see. You'd have a whole lot more. But that wasn't the point.

Academic leniency was demanded, but that wasn't the point either. That's just nonsense, because we are a small liberal, arts college. I have a Palestinian student. Did I wait for any instructions to check on how she is doing? Did I need to wait for any instructions to give her extra time? No, this is just what we do.

There was a war in Ukraine that started two years ago. Didn't we show consideration for the students that were directly affected? There was no need for the whole big list of demands. This is something that easily the student body, if they want to represent the individuals, I don't even know what's the size of the group, but there's a good chance that the number is very small, could be easily done through the Deans, but that was not the purpose. We are lenient. This is what we do here. But the point was to make demands.

And the most important thing is that as you get to the long, long letter of demands, that's where the nasty stuff, real nasty stuff is. And that nasty stuff, I saw as Hamas apology. For example, when you put all the blame on the war on Israel, and there is no mention of Hamas, I'm sorry, this is just hard to — you can speak about different levels of bias — but I'm sorry, this is Hamas apology.

And I'm a super left-wing. In terms of my definition of anti-Semitism it will probably be very narrow. Criticism of Israel, of course, allowed. I do that all the time. Criticism of any state is allowed. Obviously Israel earned the right. Israel definitely earned a lot of the criticism. Now one can also be non-Zionist right? You don't need to be Zionist. You can be a Jew that feels that you can live a full Jewish life without a homeland for the Jewish people. No problem.

You can also be an anarchist and not an anti-Semite because if you reject all the whole idea of self-determination as a group, I mean groups of determination, because then you are consistent. It's not just that you're against Zionism. You're also going to be also against any kind of nationalism and that's fine. That's consistent. But if you're only anti-Zionist that's where we have the real problem.

Now given my experience with the administration, given my lack of trust, I think the only thing that it seems that almost everybody at Haverford College agrees on is how little trust we have in the administration.

Can you give more details about that? Do you think that your academic freedom as a professor, your pedagogy, your lesson plans are being interfered with?

It was framed in the Haverford way, so that was not directly said, but we read Haverford-speak, we understand Haverford-speak. So there was an emphasis, of course, on academic freedom. However, yes, I felt that somebody was trying to impinge on my academic freedom, my freedom of speech, and worse, on my professional integrity, to actually give the most nuanced and unbiased analysis that I can.

So is this in the lead up to your teach-in? You had administrators reaching out to you, asking you to stage the teach-in a certain way or to not hold it at all?

Yes... or [at least they were] suggesting so, [but just] suggesting, [not forcing me]. Again, Haverford-speak. It's important. This is Haverford-speak. That's why I'm saying that part of the thing that so pisses me off.

There are lots of people genuinely trying to figure out what it means to be a Quaker institution. There are also lots of people that are abusing the Quaker vocabulary to promote stuff in an instrumental way, rather than reflecting genuine Quaker beliefs.

Because when really the important stuff comes up, we see that half of all Quaker procedures are thrown out the window. When there was a strike in fall 2020, was there any meeting of the whole student body to say we have reached consensus on the strike? Bullshit, none of that happened.

And the leadership of the student body is now making a similar statement. Are they really representing the full student body? Is that really the Quaker tradition? That's why I was so upset and so enraged because the letter's demands are not really about Kinnan. It was trying to take advantage of this horrendous tragedy.

You know, I want to emphasize again, I don't care if that guy that shot them is mentally ill — that would just be part of the excuses for the, you know, the prison time that he should serve — it's obvious to me that this is, this was a hate crime and this is awful. That cannot stand.

But this is not a justification to then go back and try to use that to promote an oppressive atmosphere on campus when our Jewish students are already in serious pain. And I did not trust the administration to actually respond in a proper way and they got deadlines. And so I thought that this was an important time that I needed to come up and speak my mind… use my privilege. We're teaching students here; use your privilege in a positive way. There's nothing I can do about my privilege, but how I use it. And I use my privilege to call out the campus and the leadership of the student body for completely reprehensible behavior.

You saw the tweet. I was just so outraged that this is happening, especially since there was an alternative that would have been a lot more peaceful. But that was not the objective. And I knew that this was going to create ripple effects. I knew that I'm putting a target on my back. But nobody else stood up. The students are terrified to say anything, terrified to say anything controversial on Haverford grounds on normal days.

So on days where they feel anti-Semitism everywhere, of course they won't say anything. But even faculty are afraid to speak up.

Jewish faculty and staff — just to give you a sense of the alarm that we're feeling — staff and faculty usually don't mingle. Jewish staff and faculty organized to protect our students because people here don't pay attention to what's going on because the pro-Palestinian students are mourning in a different way than the Jewish students are mourning. And the pro-Palestinian mourning is a lot more vocal. I'm not making a judgment about right or wrong here, just this is the fact of the matter.

The Jewish mourning has been each in their own corner, isolated and feeling alone. And so I knew that I'm creating this kind of controversy, but it was important that somebody made their voice heard. This all fits in a general atmosphere in Haverford that is just so narrow-minded.

I mean, I think back to when we spoke during the fall 2020 strike, I mentioned to you the student that was afraid to write a blog post about white people in rural Pennsylvania voting for Trump. I mean, that is just crazy. **[Editor's note: for an excellent article on Haverford's anti-free-speech culture, please see this student's article in The New Kronstadt: "False Omnipotence: Some Thoughts on Haverford, Free Speech, and Uncertainty."]**

In an academic institution, students cannot even write a blog post about [Trump]. Not expressing, again, not draping themselves in a MAGA hat, but just trying to explain the phenomena. There is just no tolerance for that kind of stuff, but students feel that they can harass and they can badger me, but I need to completely stay above the fray when I've been in the last eight weeks under constant kind of attacks, and I'm seeing my students, my Jewish students, in their worst time.

I'm sorry, people your age are putting their lives on the line defending our country. And now for years students at Haverford College [have been] boycotting my classes because I served in the IDF. The day after this exploded, we've been meeting with Jewish students, just to give you another sense of the alarm that we are feeling. My best ally these days: Rabbi Eli from Chabad. We work together, but I'm extremely to the left. We have the Rabbi of Chabad, the Rabbi of Hillel, faculty that [are] to my very left wing, others way to my right. All of us are coming together.

I'm an atheist, right? I mean I've been here for seventeen years. Friday was the first time that I went to a Shabbat dinner. I don't care about me, my Judaism is different. As I said, I've been building my identity as a scholar. But you know what? Fuck that! If you're gonna be hating me as a Jew, that's fine. I embrace my Jewish identity. I'm a proud Jew. I'm a proud American Jew. And we have demands. We demand that we will be treated as a minority that deserves political protections.

In general terms, outside your specific case, do you feel that if a faculty member at Haverford speaks their mind and the student body objects that the administration will support the faculty's rights?

The administration will do anything that they can to try to avoid conflict if possible. This is not about really caring for what is right. This is about considering the consequences.

I'm not sure that this is something that is completely wrong. I understand that the college as an institution has interests as well that they need to take into account. I'm not sure how their handling is actually really helping the institutional interest because I'm sure that the college is now suffering at a time that is a donation time.

Whether it's from people that support me or people that oppose me, the whole Haverford community at-large is up at arms. There are groups of Jewish alumni and Jewish parents that are organizing counter-letters from former students. And I get lots of students that are writing behind me as it happened during the strike when I stood for free speech. And people wrote me emails saying, thank you for doing what is right, and that we hope that you understand why we cannot stand with you and say this publicly.

So this environment seems to remind you of the fall 2020 strike at Haverford.

Yes.

Okay. And what about when you were first being hired at Haverford? Given Haverford being a Quaker, historically-pacifist institution, have you felt from your arrival on campus a question about your academic freedom?

My hiring got more complicated because there were people that suggested teaching about war and conflict legitimizes violence. So there I was, I was here for a job talk in early November. I did not get a job offer until March and only after the department insisted that they want to have me, that I bring something different. But from the

beginning I knew that I'm not welcome. The department welcomed me. But I knew that I'm here for a small segment of the students that actually care for security issues. But it doesn't bother me because as long as I [am] able to do what I need to do with my students in the classroom, I don't [need the] ability to affect the whole campus. I can affect one person at a time or I can affect my class. And you know, students either really hate me or really like me.

I have a Palestinian student that took a class with me in the spring, the evolution of the jihadi movement. Now, if I was Islamophobic, do you think that she would have stayed and taken two classes with me this semester?

I always say because I studied the jihadi movement, you need to understand my focus is international security. That means that there is a bias in the kind of stuff that I'm interested in. Just know that there is a lot of literature that speaks about different kinds of aspects [of international security]. So for example, I tried when we did the class about religion and international relations to also assign readings about how you can use religion to promote peace.

But I always try to speak about that. When I speak about Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, I always make it very clear how little support they actually have. And that even Muslims around the world that would like to see more religion in their life are appalled by that kind of view of Islam. I'm always [cautious], because I know that these kinds of things that I study could be mobilized for Islamophobia. I hardly use the term “terrorist” or “terrorist organization” because it's an identity term and because I saw how politicians are abusing that.

I usually try to speak about non-state actors. I'm also one that doesn't have any problem admitting that even states can commit terrorism. And I argue my points. So this is all very disappointing. I was always in my corner. I did not want to become suddenly involved in that conflict. I feel that people are going after me because [of] my brash style. But really the issue that they have is how did I burst their bubble?

I mean, I mentioned the conversation with the students. It was so heartbreaking. People here don't understand the depth of the problem and in part because [Jewish] mourning [at Haverford] is so silent.

I grew up in Israel. My views of my understanding of anti-Semitism or how it looked like, I did not really know. To see our students like that was so painful. And what's really even more outrageous to me is that people don't understand, especially here, a lot of speak about trauma. But they don't try to understand the mentality of the people that came out of the Holocaust. They don't understand the triggering aspect of hiding. Whether it's the hiding of people on October 7th, in stories of real kids hiding in closets as they see through the tiny fraction of the light, how their parents are being killed in front of their eyes, beheaded.

Do you see a connection between that physical hiding in broader history and self-censorship at places like Haverford?

Yes. This is an immediate inclination of American Jews. And so, one of the greatest things that we managed to do is to at least we, when I say we, not the full college community. “We” are the few Jewish professors that really care for those students and their problems. And we brought them together. We helped them connect. We gave them, or tried to give them, a space where they can speak more freely. I mean, it was an event that started with, I mean, as one of the most painful moments in my life and ended up as the most inspiring.

Because we decided that we're going to be proud Jews, that we're not going to let this bullshit happen. So, I did not want to be in this situation. I did not want to be Jewish. But, if you hate me as a Jew — I'm going to embrace my Jewish identity and with my people we're going to fight against it.

You've referred to yourself a lot throughout this conversation as trying to build your identity as a scholar. In your public comments, you have called settlers in the West Bank “terrorists” and “genocidal.” So I'm curious, as a scholar, if you think it's necessary to risk offending people in order to pursue the truth.

Well, obviously, yes. I mean, I have no doubt. Now, how you offend people, there can be different ways that you can offend people, and there can be different levels of offense. But we have got to go to the truth. Even if the truth is uncomfortable.

Has anyone ever accused you actually of anti-Semitism for your blunt criticisms or analysis of Israeli security policy?

So the Dean that was trying to dissuade me from hosting the teach-in, he jumped on an email that came from actually a Jewish student that said that the teach-in is too early, it's insensitive, there are people that are still mourning. The Dean's email said students fear it's going to lead to an increase in anti-Semitism. To the student's email, I responded saying, bluntly, "I'm sorry for any personal connection to losses, my family was affected directly as well, however we are, first, an academic institution and our job is to inform, second we are an American academic institution and at the time that the United States is sending forces to the Middle East and American forces might be putting their lives on the line, we have to be speaking about what is going on." I said obviously I do not expect you to attend this talk but I don't think that you have any right to deny other people who want to pursue this knowledge, that opportunity. And since the student wrote me and the Dean, that's created an opening for the Dean to then jump in.

Now the thing is that since I think it's my teaching, the Jewish community here, its opinion about me and definitely since the tweet has completely changed because I mean there were people who were in the Jewish community that did not want to take my classes because of my views. The funny thing is that my politics really are not relevant to my classes, I'm teaching a class about conflict in the Middle East, it's phrased “IR theory, conflict, and the Middle East” because the point is to take international relations theories and try to work about how they try to explain the Middle East, my classes don't involve passion, I don't care about your passions, passion should go to somebody else's class.

In my class we're gonna argue and I don't care about your personal position. I want you to be able to argue both sides because what we are teaching is logic. And yes, going back to your question, you always gotta pursue the truth.

I tell students that they want to tell me about what they want to write their papers and they have their conclusion on what they're going to find and I say, no, that can't work like that. If you know the true result, you don't need to do the paper. And how can you really know the answer before you conduct [the] research?

Some of the sources that people are using in order to make claims about current events, certain Instagram posts and stuff that you just say, we are doing something very wrong here if students don't understand how the academic enterprise actually works. I mean everything is in front of us to see if we just are willing to open our eyes. It's not

comfortable. And again, I just want to emphasize none of that should mean that we shouldn't support our Palestinian students that are grieving. But it is also important that colleges will know to draw some lines.

I know that this is hard. How you produce the balance between free speech and hate. And in general, I would try to limit the limitations as much as possible. But I don't see college administrators in most places doing something like that. And so the Jews, whether it's faculty, staff, or students are left alone. I mean everybody saw yesterday's ridiculous hearing in Congress.

Oh, I wanted to ask about this. You mentioned earlier you would be in favor of a narrower definition of anti-Semitism. And I wanted to ask you what you think about Congress currently considering a bill that would make into law a pretty broad definition of anti-Semitism. So I am curious if you have some concerns about legitimate expression being curtailed as a result?

Absolutely. I tell you, well first, in principle, I don't think that BDS — I mean not necessarily against Israel — but a boycott as a tool seems to be a perfectly legitimate tool. And so when states are banning BDS, I think that this is wrong because calls for a boycott [in general] should not be banned. Now, if you're genocidal calling for that, but that's not going to be about the call, it's going to be about who you are. Criticism of Israel, obviously, is allowed. So is criticism of Zionist thinking.

So, for my students, I think that it should be allowed to criticize people like Herzl, obviously. I mean Herzl, there is actually a lot of critical work about that. Herzl's vision of Israel, he underestimated what would be the effects on the Palestinian indigenous people from the return of the Jewish indigenous people. By the way, we could have done that if Haverford actually allowed us to offer a class on Israeli politics next semester that was going to be funded by the Israel Institute, but Haverford decided under lame excuses of “unforeseen potential legal consequences” not to take money from the Israel Institute, which is a super legitimate institute that puts visiting professors in places like Stanford, Cornell, etc. and does not intervene.

And we have in the neighborhood somebody that came from Israel to the area for a year who is an expert on the Oslo Accords, who has a PhD in history from UCLA, and we had a freebie. And we have a class on Israeli politics in our books. Now they are

trying to find some excuse that they are not used to this or that this is an advocacy group, the Israeli Institute, therefore they can't accept. I call bullshit. Yeah. And you know, especially "unforeseen legal potential" and "unforeseen legal consequences" — that seems to me like completely whitewashing and sort of giving you an answer that you cannot really argue with.

Who is this decision coming from?

It happened in the summer, I don't know. The decision is conveyed as coming from the provost, but I don't know who actually made the decision. I don't know what's the structure, to one extent. The president is actually controlling all the communication, because we see the communication is not really a strong suit. I don't know whether this is a bunch of people that are organizing all that. So it's hard for me to tell… I'm not privy to these kinds of things.

I did want to ask about a specific incident at Bryn Mawr, not at Haverford, but there were some students who were having a sit-in in the Dean's office at Bryn Mawr and the Deans there took down some of their posters and wanted to bring them to an Honor Trial. And I wanted to ask you if you had any thoughts on that. These were pro-Palestinian protesters and their signs did include the phrase "from the River to the Sea." And I'm curious for you how you feel about this in relation to free speech.

I would say not [ok to have an Honor Trial] for the sit-in, yes for the genocidal phrase. But I don't know how the Honor Code functions. And well, again, it's not like I'm sure that we really know what it means here or that we actually really follow it or just play along. But yes, and again, just based on the details that you gave me, I would say the sit-in is legitimate. It could frustrate the students, right? Because the provost or the president can take countermeasures as we saw in Swarthmore.

Yeah, the president of Swarthmore also doesn't have any problem walking through them and getting to their office and doing their work. So yeah, no problem with that. But the genocidal claims. I'm sorry, part of the story here is that the anti-Zionist Jewish groups on American campuses are legitimizing these calls. And they are trying to argue that they actually represent the true Jewish voice. But the thing is that they are a marginal fringe group among American Jews. And they are not the ones that will determine what

is anti-Semitic and what is not. And the same way that every other minority has the right to speak out, determine what they consider as hate towards them, so do Jews.

But you see that those that are using the genocidal claims, that I want to separate, you can be a pro-Palestinian demonstrator, which would be perfectly legitimate with me. There is a good reason to be pro-Palestinian these days. I just don't understand the people that rather than be pro-Palestinian are being pro-Hamas. I constantly criticize the policies of the state of Israel, while at the same time, think that Hamas sort of signaled what kind of actor it is, and that this is not an actor that you can actually do business with. You can have these kinds of viewpoints, so properly stated demonstrators don't need to be pro-Hamas.

Sit-ins, obviously part of the right to free speech, but for order there needs to be some limits, right? Because you also need to... there is a limit to how much you actually then intimidate the people where you are doing the sit-in. So it's complicated and it's not really my field. **[Editor's note: for an overview of the First Amendment's boundaries and an explanation of why "From the River to the Sea," taken alone, is protected political expression under the United States Constitution, see this article from FIRE: "As campuses reel, a reminder of the First Amendment's boundaries."]**

So at this point I'm speaking with less confidence. But I would say the statement itself would be extremely problematic. And the fact that things like that, posted from what I understood, these kinds of slogans, are put in places like the Dining Center.

I mean, when I did the teach-in, I told the students, I don't expect you to come. I could have done something in my class, but that would be forcing the discussion on a captive audience, and would be wrong. Right? Now in my seminar, it was a different story. So in my seminar, I informed students before and I told students: I'm going to be doing the same bit of teach-in stuff in the seminar today. And I don't expect anybody to be there. So if you feel uncomfortable, there is no problem. You can [leave]... I'm not going to impose on you to actually listen to that.

So to see the imposition of genocidal claims on our Haverford students in a public space that they can't really avoid. So what would be the solution? Do they need to take their food and go back to their rooms? Is that how we want to imagine Jewish life here?

And the stuff that happened in Plenary. Right? Again, the selective use of Quaker principles to just serve you instrumentally.

Haverford College has 13.4 self-identified liberal students for every one self-identified conservative student. Do you think that's a problem?

I think it's reality.

Yes, I mean, these days, obviously it's a problem. But how do you convince people to come to Haverford that are less liberal when you can't even write a blog post about why people might be voting for Trump in rural Pennsylvania without fearing repercussions?

I had a couple of former students that ended up joining the military. Just imagine the nightmare of these students that go to Haverford, knowing that they want to join the military afterwards and the kind of attitude that they're getting. I mean, it's not surprising that the few that we have, some of them end up working with me because I appreciate working with them. They are protecting us. There is a kind of mean, disgraceful lack of gratitude. I mean people live here in comfort, completely ignorant, which allows them then to hate the state, the country, without really giving any positive credit for the fact that there are people that are putting their lives on the line to protect us and even though you can have issues with the government and how it sends them, you gotta give respect to those people that are showing true patriotism and really care and are putting their lives on the line. But a student like that will never feel comfortable at Haverford. So how would we get this guy?

People at Haverford have complained for a long time about the inability to speak their mind. And these are liberals, when we're speaking about different shades of liberalism. If for half a second I'm considering the conservative fringe, what the fuck?

That's a great quote.

And you can use that. So, did you know that I say in class, I try to say “fuck” in class three times? I try to normalise it, because when you say fuck, it's an emphasis. What the fuck? Sometimes you just gotta say it.

Yeah, that's free speech. There's a Lenny Bruce quote, it's like, I don't know… “You lose the freedom to say fuck, you lose the freedom to say fuck the government,” or something like that. And, as you know, most Haverford College

students profess to be very skeptical of the government and of the police, but at the same time, they still want to give the power to the governor or police to shut people up… or to give that power to the college administration…

… to shut the other people up.

Right, yes. It's free speech for me, but not for thee.

And the same about security, right? So the safety on campus is not just for the Palestinian students, right? What about the ability to protect the Jewish students? Maybe the Jewish students do want to see more patrols of Campus Safety, even though the demand writers call for less of it.

Do you think there's something performative going on here?

Oh, mostly, Haverford is mostly about performance. It's a lot more performance than action. Again, going back to the fall 2020 strike. Six days. This whole thing happens. Five or six days before the general election where the results could be the end of the United States as we know it. And they were dealing with a real issue that happened in Philadelphia. But because of an email, they didn't end up in Philadelphia. Instead of actually focusing on what's going on outside and doing the real fight, they went back to fighting on campus as if the world around them is not falling apart. I mean, this was sort of the band on the Titanic, playing on the Titanic, which was crazy to me.

If you really want to now promote the Palestinian cause, I think that some of the things that the pro-Palestinian protesters are doing are extremely counterproductive for their cause. I have a former student that is an aide to a senator. She tells me, we don't pay attention to all this crap. What we do pay attention to is when we get letters and phone calls. But they are so attached to the activism as the performance, rather than as activism supposed to actually provide results.

If your interest is really the Palestinian people, I can give you a list of things that you can do that would help the Palestinian people. But if your issue is simply the performance of rage, then it becomes again just about the protesters, rather than about the Palestinians. But then it does create a reality. It does create a reality where you see an increase in both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Don't want to assign Islamophobia even primarily or partly to this action, when Islamophobia exists regardless. But clearly

there are people that are seeing these kinds of statements and say, this does not help their cause.

Activism is allowed and we should accept it, even if I think that that sort of activism is pointless in this context. It could work in a grass-roots kind of work, but not in this kind of context. This is not how you influence policy. They also did the thing that for me is completely anti-intellectual. The lack of causality, the shift, the vague arguments that try to link the shooting of Palestinian students in Vermont to an atmosphere on campus, was supposed to make sure that nobody dares to speak out about anti-Semitism or share Zionist opinions.

And a specific student was singled out as well.

Yes, and this is just horrendous and I'm still waiting to hear from the president that the singling out of those [students] and it's not just her that was singled out, it was basically all the Zionist students.

Now back to my definition of Zionism, my definition of Zionism can be really narrow but I envision Zionism as the belief in the right of the Jewish people for self-determination in the land of Israel. There are versions of Zionism that will be genocidal. I know I go against them. My version of Zionism is one that probably applies to everybody within the country, where it's a country for Jews, but not just for Jews. So I would like to see a lot greater equality within the state of Israel. So Israel could be a place, the home of the Jewish people, but also the home of all its citizens. So my definition is very narrow. My definition of Zionism, which means that I allow for a lot more criticism of Zionist thought . . . or there is a lot more space to criticize. Of course, Zionist scholars have been arguing about what is Zionism, internal problems with Zionism, so this goes on.

In the definition of Zionism and of Israel you were just kind of expounding, I heard a lot of emphasis on pluralism, on multiple forms of thinking, and also on multiple groups of people. So, I suppose this is maybe a basic, elementary question, but why is pluralism important?

It almost feels ridiculous to have to answer that kind of question and I can see in your smile that this is just a ridiculous thing… isn’t it, that we're actually having to deal with this question?

Pluralism is important because through pluralism you hear new perspectives. They allow you to see things from different points of view which then allow you to judge the situation better, get the facts more accurately, brainstorm on new ideas that could help us find better solutions to whatever kind of problems we are facing.

Pluralism also has the benefit that it allows people to feel that they belong in a bigger framework. I kept emphasizing that what we are seeing now because of the alarm that Jews on campus feel is that we are actually expressing our pluralism within the Jewish community. We have a lot of differences. Me and the Chabad Rabbi are not necessarily supposed to [agree], but this is [where things are,] and we have lots of respect. The same way that I have lots of respect for Sa'ed Atshan at Swarthmore. That's pluralism. But the point is the good faith. We speak about pluralism here. We don't do pluralism. And definitely when we speak about pluralism, I don't think we speak about it in good faith.

And what would you like to say to the people who are saying you don't belong at Haverford? What is your response to those who seek to have you removed from our community for your expression?

I probably won't be able to change the mind of people that hate me, [but for] people that still are willing to see [what] I am [like], I recommend that they take my classes or speak with former students of mine. But in reality, my view is that what every student here needs is not the whole faculty.

Every student here basically needs one or two professors, one that they feel completely comfortable and safe to speak with, one that they know is always on their side. And second, somebody that they're interested in their subject and granted being able to also get along with them.

Ideally, you can combine the two. And so I know that I'm a niche person. There are lots of people that won't take my classes simply because I was born in Israel and — as an Israeli citizen — served in the military. It's not like I had a choice. Well, I suppose I could have gone to prison. I would like to see any of the kids here willing to take that kind of action.

— William Harris ‘24, for The New Kronstadt (Dec 8, 2023)

Ally Landau, Speaking Freely: A Student Interview

An interview

Ally Landau is a senior at Haverford College majoring in Psychology. Recently, she hosted a student teach-in following the October 7th terrorist attacks to share her viewpoint and initiate dialogue amongst the student body.

In recent weeks, Ally has been singled out for sharing her opinions.

A list of demands sent to the Haverford College administration by student activists called out Ally by name for sending an email to the hc-allstudents listserv titled "Silenced Jewish Voices." Ally sent her email in the wake of fall Plenary, one of two annual meetings of the entire Haverford student body — hosted by Students' Council — to ratify student governance documents and propose new policies.

This year's fall Plenary included a "community comment" period, where members of Students for Justice in Palestine spoke about the Israel-Hamas War. The title of Ally's email reflected the fact that no response from a differing point of view was aired during this section of Plenary. Her email generated controversy on campus, with students upset that her email had been allowed and administrators apologizing for approving it. In the ensuing aftermath, Students' Council and the administration modified the hc-allstudents listserv policy to prevent similar emails from being sent in the future.

Amidst all this, I sat down with Ally to seek her uncensored opinions about free speech and the openness of discourse at Haverford College.

Here is a barely-edited transcript of our conversation.

In your email to the student body, you reference how the Students' Council denied students from responding to Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP)'s monologue at Plenary. Could you share more details about that?

Yeah, so I think what happened was that I was not planning on saying anything in the "community comment" section of Plenary initially. It was just intimidating to go and speak in front of the entire student body, but once four different people stood up and started talking about their pro-Palestinian beliefs, I decided I wanted to respond. The

problem was that I had not signed up beforehand to speak in the “community comment” section.

So I went over and talked to Dean McKnight, during plenary, while it was happening, and he messaged [Students’ Council Co-President] Jorge [Paz Reyes] asking if [he] could extend [the “community comment” section] so that I could give a response or something like that. Jorge didn't see the message until after Plenary ended, or maybe he did — I don't know. You'd have to ask him if he saw it or not, but [the “community comment”] wasn't extended and I wasn't given the opportunity to respond. So I decided to write [an] email [to the whole student body] as my response instead.

Ok. I'm curious if you happen to know any details about whether or not the SJP “community comment” was planned in advance, since you weren’t able to speak since you hadn’t signed up beforehand.

I don't know, I haven't spoken to them specifically. It seemed planned to me just because they had [a] PowerPoint projection. They had four different people all speaking. We've never really had a “community comment” section before in Plenary in the years I've been here.

This was the first time it was really sort of happening like that. So it did seem planned. I mean, I had asked a few other people, I have friends on the Students’ Council, if there were any parts of the Plenary that were gonna be about the Israel Palestine situation. And they all told me no, but so I don't know for sure, so you'd have to ask them, I guess.

Okay. And in your email you mentioned a concern about the one-sidedness of the viewpoint presented during that section of Plenary.

Yeah.

And so I'm curious about how you feel the response to your email was, both from the administration and the student body.

Yeah, so I guess right after the email was sent, I was anticipating backlash. Of course, I knew a lot of people on campus didn't agree with me. Most of the negative backlash was pretty indirect. A lot of it was just people screenshotting it and writing stuff on social media, or like a few DMs that I got that were somewhat negative, but nothing too extreme at least, at least not directly towards me.

There were also a lot of positives. I had a lot of people email me back saying that they appreciated the email that they felt heard, and they were too afraid to speak out themselves, but they were the large ones that they want alone, and stuff like that.

That was a positive outcome of it. I also was appreciative that the administration did actually let the email go through in communication with them. The reasoning behind it was because the student council had previously sent out an hc-allstudents listserv email regarding their walkout advertising it.

So they were in my conversation with you tonight. The rationale was that they were allowed to advertise that, which was about the situation that I too was allowed to send my email. Recently, I spoke with some people on student council who told me that in part of their demands in response to the email, it wasn't necessarily directly at the content of my email, but more about the fact that it was even approved because the hc-allstudents email shouldn't be, like the rules behind it, it shouldn't have been approved to begin with.

But like I said, I think the reason it wasn't because the Students' Council had already used the hc-allstudents listserv to promote their side of it. So I think they wanted to sort of like even it out, I guess, so to speak. Sorry, what was the second part of your question?

Well, yeah, I was just kind of wondering where your concerns stand now. Like, the initial response and if you have any new thoughts about where things are headed.

Well, I had already given the teach-in before I sent the email, and I think the teach-in and the email initially — even though I did get some backlash — I was happy with how [they] went, and I was proud that I was able to say what I wanted to say.

Then more recently, of course, the demands came out, and my name was specifically put in the list of demands, which I thought was inappropriate, especially since they were saying that their problem was with administration allowing the email to be sent rather than the content of the email itself.

So [while] we did convince them to take my name out of the demands, which I appreciated, everyone already [saw] my name, and everyone knows the references to the hc-allstudents listserv are obviously in regard to me.

I think the difficult part is that the demands came out right after Kinnan and his friends were shot, and a lot of their advertising of it and asking people to sign it was that you were standing in solidarity with Kinnan and the hate crime that he suffered.

And I think that if that was what all of the demands were about, then I gladly would have signed, and I would love to show my support for that, but the fact that it was combined with all this other stuff including my email and asking the administration to make a political statement saying that Israel is at fault for an apartheid state makes it much more difficult to kind of show that I can support Kinnan.

And even like perhaps call for a ceasefire, but that's not what they're actually saying in the demands, which is a bit unfortunate that a lot of people are signing under the pretense that it's just in support of a ceasefire when in reality the demands specifically state that they want Haverford to condemn Israel for being an apartheid state.

So I think my biggest concern right now is people being pressured to sign based on false pretenses of what the demands actually are. And I think that's also going to make it a lot more difficult for the administration to sign off on the demands and for us to move forward because it's not just about the ceasefire or just about Kinnan or just about academics. You can see there's all these other things grouped into it, which makes it much more difficult to find a solution, I think.

Right. One thing I've noticed throughout your responses is you have said a number of times that the Students' Council and the administration claim their objections to your email are not about the content or the viewpoint of your message. However, I've read some things to the contrary. In the lengthier Google Doc with the demands' fine print, but also on social media and more informal spaces, there has been a lot of conflations connecting your words — sometimes referencing you by name — to Islamophobic rhetoric or other charged rhetoric out there they say is responsible for the hate crime against Kinnan and his friends. So, I'm curious if you really believe that you aren't being singled out for your viewpoint.

Yeah, I think that I've heard a lot of that stuff too as well — that my email bore a direct relation to the crime that Kinnan and his friends experienced, which I think is just wildly inaccurate. First of all, the man who shot them was not Jewish. He didn't go to Haverford. He never read my email. Second of all, I don't think my email was Islamophobic. I think the main things I've heard from people who disagreed with it was that they thought the word “hijacking” was inflammatory [as well as] the word “fringe” in regards to Jewish Voice for Peace.

I mean, I won't apologize for anything I wrote. I wouldn't have sent it if I didn't believe it. If other students had read it beforehand and they had told me, look, the word “hijacking” in particular is one that is really aggravating, I could have found a different word. I can't think of one on the spot right now, [but] I think the point of my email that I was hoping to get across and the part that I was expecting backlash from did not actually [correspond to the response].

They were just singling out that one word, which was not what I was expecting at all, to be honest. So yeah, I thought that it's very inaccurate to say that my email is the reason for Kinnan being shot.

And if you are going to say that, then they should specify the actual content of the email, not just one specific word that they have a problem with, like "hijacking," which is the main thing that I've been hearing from people.

That's interesting. That relates to one of the other things I wanted to ask about. I see now that the Students' Council and the administration are working through revising the hc-allstudents listserv policy. And I'm curious if you have any thoughts about that.

Yeah, I actually don't know what the initial policy was. I don't know what they're trying to change it to. I really don't know any of the specifics on that. All I know is when I wanted to send my email, I sent it to the Students’ Council first and they said I had to send it to Dean McKnight to get approved.

So I sent it to him and then it was approved and sent. I have no idea what the actual policy is on which emails are allowed to be sent or not. I actually probably should look into that a bit more. Cause yeah, all I've heard is that Dean McKnight approving my email to be sent went against the policy, but I don't know exactly what the policy was or what was violated.

Interesting. So I have the text of the policy available for reference.

Okay, yeah.

So, this is an updated policy just to be clear, but it went into effect on December 1st. So this is kind of, I guess, in response to your email. And so it wouldn't have been in effect back then. But one of the things that it says is that "when deciding if an email breaks the policies and practices described above, the decision of rejecting the email will also be made in accordance with the following excerpts from section 3.04, subsection B of the Honor Code.: 'Using one's political beliefs to justify disrespectful or discriminatory words or actions is a violation of the code. And also respect entails a mutual regard for others, [...]'"

Yeah.

So I'm curious, given that from my vantage point, it seems like a lot of pro-Palestinian protesters find pro-Israel students' comments to be in some way Islamophobic or promoting violence — I mean, there's been rhetoric that's connecting your email to what happened to Kinnan — and so some find it disrespectful or even discriminatory. Likewise, certainly a lot of the pro-Palestinian protesters have had some of the speech they've engaged in, such as "from the river to the sea," called out as anti-Semitic or at least as insensitive. So I'm curious if you have any concerns about the email policy. Do you think that under this new policy, you would be able to send out the email you sent back then? And do you think that's a problem? You know, I mean, what do you think about saying you can only send an email if your political beliefs won't offend anyone?

Yeah, I mean, yeah, I think you nailed it on the nose of the fact that the pro-Palestinian group believes that a lot of stuff in my email is potentially Islamophobic. And then there's the Jewish students who believe that a lot of the rhetoric that the pro-Palestinian group is using is anti-Semitic.

It goes both ways. I think the difference is that I specifically pointed out the direct terms that I found to be anti-Semitic, like "from the river to the sea" or "genocide," and those terms specifically. In regards to my email, the only thing that I've heard back from anyone is that the word "hijacking" [in the context of students imposing their viewpoint during the "community comment" period of Plenary] was the most inflammatory part, which I didn't initially even think about.

I didn't relate that [word] to Islamophobia at all in my initial writing of it. I think maybe if with this new policy they had wanted to say that my political beliefs were justifying discrimination of certain people, it would have to pinpoint which parts those were, and right now that pinpoint is that word, "hijacking. "

So maybe if I had changed that word, it still would have been allowed to be sent. I'm not sure what else would have been seen as Islamophobic, seeing as nobody has given me any specifics [in regards to] that.

So yeah, I do think it's interesting or difficult to say like you can't send an email where your political beliefs might offend someone because any political belief of any topic relating to politics is gonna offend someone.

So it's difficult to say, but regarding my email specifically, I have not heard any specific details about which parts were Islamophobic, just that the word hijacking was inflammatory. So maybe if I had taken out that one word, it still would have been allowed to be sent with this new policy.

That's interesting. You mentioned the teach-in you did earlier. So I'm curious what prompted you to hold that teach-in, what was your Kronstadt moment that made you want to speak out and engage in dialogue?

Yeah, well, right after the, the, the, of an October 7th, I met with Wendy, I think, a day or two later after she had sent her email about it. And I was asking her if she could send a

follow -up email specifically condemning Hamas and acknowledging that they are a terrorist organization, which in my talks with Kinnan and other pro-Palestinian people, they've all agreed to that.

That's not something that we really disagree on at all. So I thought it was fair for me to ask Wendy to do that. And she said she had no intention of sending another email. So I said, well, I still want to get this point across.

I know there was already a teach-in planned with Barak Mendelssohn, but I wanted to give my own teach-in to really get my personal points across. And she said, "yeah," like she encouraged me to do it.

And so I planned that. Initially, I was just planning on presenting [myself] and then having a Q&A.

I did a lot of research. I spoke with a lot of my teachers from home, professors from here, looked through the Haverford database, all that stuff, and put together a presentation.

And [when I was] advertising for it, Kinnan saw my post on Instagram and reached out to me. We had a few phone calls, exchanged a lot of messages, just about our different beliefs, stuff like that.

And he asked us at the end of my presentation, he'd be allowed to come up and give his perspective. And I said, of course, so it was kind of this joint thing where I gave my presentation, he gave his and then everyone asked questions.

And I think it was a very good starting point, [with regard to] everyone understanding that there was a different perspective to [the conflict than] and just conversing about it. I thought it was a very respectful teach-in. Everyone who came was there to listen and learn, and obviously provide their own perspective too, but that's kind of what I wanted from it, is to have that dialogue. So I thought it was a good start.

And then I think after hearing things at Plenary, I just wanted to make my points heard even louder, or more specifically, by a broader segment of the campus community, which is why I then sent the email afterwards as well.

Given the fact you were able to have that open dialogue at your teach-in with Kinnan, with other perspectives represented, how do you feel about the juxtaposition with plenary, where only one point of view was presented, and with a controversy erupting over your email seeking to provide a second kind of viewpoint to the whole student body?

Yeah, I think, I mean, it's difficult. Haverford loves to say that we pride ourselves on dialogue, on conversation, and like, I've seen quotes in newspapers like that have said, well, if liberal arts campuses can't find a way to get past this, then nobody can, and stuff like that, which in a sense is true.

I mean, these are our core values, and obviously with a topic as controversial, and impactful as this is, it's gonna be more difficult, of course. I mean, I think it could have been more well received if I had made my points at Plenary rather than in the email. But like I said, I hadn't initially planned on saying anything at Plenary because of course, it's intimidating being in a room full of people that the majority of whom disagree with you.

And I only wanted to say something in response just to show that there was another perspective. But yeah, I think having the teaching before all of this other email and demands and everything else happened at least showed that I was willing to have dialogue, which I think maybe made it a little bit more well received.

And I've attended all of the, or as many of the school sanctioned presentations and discussions that I've been able to, including the ones which were led only by pro-Palestinian professors, just to show that I am trying to gain that other perspective and hear people out.

So I think that that was definitely a good way to kind of show that. Unfortunately, I think people still don't wanna fully have that dialogue because they know how firm I am in my beliefs based on the email.

So I think it was beneficial to have it, but I don't know how much good it actually has done.

I was also curious if you heard from any administrators or faculty members in the lead up to your teach-in, particularly since Professor Mendelsohn received suggestions to modify or suspend his faculty teach-in from administrators.

Yeah, no, [I didn't]. I think because I was just advertising it on my own social media, it wasn't really well known that it was happening. So no professors reached out to me until afterwards when there was an article in the clerk about it.

And then also after I'd sent my email, a lot of, not a lot, but faculty had reached out to me just offering their support or if there was someone who agreed with me just wanting to converse with me about it and stuff like that.

But in the lead up to the teaching, I hadn't spoken with any faculty at Haverford. I did reach out to some of my teachers from high school and some people I knew from my community back home just to kind of proofread my presentation and like fact check, but nobody from Haverford beforehand, just after the fact.

I was curious if you saw the petition circulating seeking to have Professor Mendelsohn sanctioned or fired. If so, what are your thoughts about it in relation to free speech?

Yeah, I think, I mean, of course, Professor Mendelsohn has made his beliefs very clear through his posts on social media. And I think that if he were to have said those things in his teach-in that he gave in October, soon after the event, that would have been a different story and people might have had more of a reason to call for action. **[Editor's note: for an interview with Professor Mendelsohn which addresses these events, please see this article in *The New Kronstadt*: "Barak Mendelsohn, Uncensored: A Campus Conversation."]**

I think the fact that he's doing it on his own personal Twitter accounts or in response to specific student emails [makes it out of bounds] to call for him to be fired, whether you agree with him or not.

Obviously, I've spoken with him a lot in the past few months. There's plenty of stuff we agree on, plenty of stuff we disagree on. I think the fact that a lot of the demand writers are advocating for free speech and then [calling] for his dismissal is a little bit hypocritical, especially because he's been doing it on his own personal platforms.

He hasn't been doing it — at least not that I've heard of — within his classrooms or the teach-in he gave. I'm not in any of his classes, so I actually don't know specifically, but I think that would be a different story.

But all of the stuff that I've been seeing has just been from his Twitter accounts or personal emails, responding to people, which I don't think is good enough, or is a good enough reason to ask for him to be fired.

I mean, that's his own personal viewpoint, which he's completely allowed to have as long as it's not compromising the way he interacts with his students in his class or grades or papers or stuff like that.

You mentioned something that stood out to me: the hypocrisy of the demands on the subject of free speech, particularly while simultaneously calling for a professor to be fired. I was just curious if you had any more thoughts on that. And what are your feelings about free speech for those who disagree with you?

Yeah, I think that one of my biggest issues with the demands is that when I read the first two demands, I was pretty optimistic. I was like, yeah, I can get on board with this. And then it started to seem like, oh, we only want free speech when it's about our beliefs or something like that, which I think is just, like, you can't make that point if you're gonna call for free speech.

It has to be for everyone, whether you agree with them or not. I mean, of course, there's restrictions within free speech, specifically right now, there's the postering policy that there seems to be violations of, or in their case, the violations of the hc-allstudents listserv email being sent out. So there's obviously restrictions in place, but to say that people shouldn't be allowed to say certain things just because it disagrees with them is not free speech at all.

That's not what free speech is, like, in its definition. So I think that one of my biggest concerns is that they're calling for free speech, but if you look at the fine print, it's really only free speech for their point of view.

And what would you like to say to people — especially students — who are too afraid to speak out right now, either alongside you, sharing your viewpoint, or

those who might be too intimidated to talk to you knowing that they don't share your viewpoint?

Yeah, I guess to the people who do share similar viewpoints and are too afraid to speak out, I mean, it's understandable. It's difficult to have to defend your beliefs, especially if you feel that you don't have enough knowledge to fully defend it.

But what I would say is that I think we have a unique opportunity being at Haverford in the sense that I have never felt a sense of physical violence from anyone. Most people, even if they do very much disagree with me, don't pose a threat in a sense, but in a physical sense at least to me.

And I think that gives us the opportunity to speak our minds without having to be too fearful. So I would encourage people to educate themselves and say what they believe. And then to the people who disagree with me, I guess I would just say, I think there's two groups within the people who disagree with me.

I think there's the people who are joining on the bandwagon because they don't necessarily know any better. They've been told, oh, we're calling for a ceasefire, we're in solidarity with Kinnan, and that's about it.

So I would encourage those people to really read through the entirety of the demands and form their own opinions, as well as do some more research about the whole Israel-Palestine conflict in general before forming an opinion.

And then to those who obviously have done plenty of research are personally affected and very much disagree with me, [I would invite them to talk]. I think Kinnan is a perfect example. He has reached out to me, and we've had productive conversations.

Obviously, neither one of us is gonna change the other's mind, but just to have that conversation, I think if more people could follow his lead, it would be great. He was the one that was most significantly impacted, so if he can do it, then why [can't] everyone else reach out and converse. The goal is not to change each other's minds, but to find commonalities.

— William Harris '24, for The New Kronstadt (Dec 18, 2023)

Frequently Asked Questions

Why doesn't The New Kronstadt feature anonymous submissions?

Launched upon the premise that Haverford College has a problem with self-censorship, The New Kronstadt recognizes all of its contributors by name. Haverford College, of course, does have issues with formal censorship, including prohibitions on speech that would be protected by the First Amendment, which are enumerated in the recently-amended Honor Code. Nevertheless, a sizable contributor to the anti-free-speech culture on campus is people choosing not to speak their mind rather than being formally prohibited from doing so. The New Kronstadt seeks to break the cycle of self-censorship on campus by publishing Think Piece articles and Kronstadt Moment stories whose authors use bylines rather than pseudonyms. Self-censorship, unlike formal censorship, is a cultural issue as opposed to a policy issue, and it requires a culture-shifting solution.

Does The New Kronstadt acknowledge the differences in context between its eponymous historical allegory and the situation today?

Of course. The New Kronstadt does not intend to conflate today's moment with the historical situation of the Soviet Union. What The New Kronstadt aims to do with the historical allusions it makes is to recover wisdom from the unique strain of thinking produced by those who stood up for free speech, free association, and free elections in the name of the Kronstadt. The idea that civil liberties should transcend ideology is one that transcends time, also. The New Kronstadt subscribes to the belief that history is worth studying and the present is worth paying close attention to.