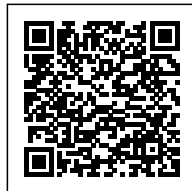


## OPINION: ACTIVISM VS. ACADEMIA AT SMITH COLLEGE

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“Comfort or freedom?” former Smith College employee Jodi Shaw asked her growing YouTube audience after announcing her resignation from the notoriously progressive school located in Massachusetts. “More and more of us will have to make choice.”

Sadly, she’s right. American higher education has gotten to the point where expressing a viewpoint that deviates even slightly from the campus groupthink will result in humiliation, reprimands, and—in Shaw’s case—a work environment so toxic that unemployment is a more appealing option than unrelenting workplace bullying and hostility.

At Smith College, student activists have exercised an outsized influence for years; as a recent New York Times feature highlighted, when a student accused a white staff member of racial bias in 2018, the administration’s first reaction was to suspend the accused Smith employee immediately, before any facts were gathered.

In an interview, the school’s president said the student deserved an apology and swift action. But there was no mention of the staff member, who was later cleared of any discrimination in an extensive report written by a law firm that was hired to investigate the incident. Yet no apology seems to have been issued to the staff member who was falsely labeled a racist and experienced significant personal and professional harassment.

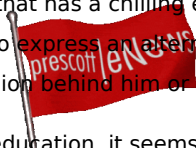
Since that ugly incident three years ago, Smith College—with its annual tuition of \$70,000 per year—has doubled down on fighting “systemic racism” by pushing critical race theory on its students and forcing staff to endure anti-bias training. Yet these reeducation efforts still aren’t enough for radical student activists on campus, who continue to demand that the administration take additional steps to remove any dissenting opinions.

Smith College may be in the spotlight this week, but they’re certainly not alone. Over the past decade, hundreds of colleges and universities across the country have adopted “bias response teams” to encourage students to anonymously identify and report both instructors and peers for holding “biased” viewpoints—which today’s students often perceive as “opinions that conflict with my own worldview.”

The University of Central Florida (UCF) is one institution that employs a bias response team, which it calls the Just Knights Response Team (JKRT). Over the past year, it was weaponized to collect evidence of problematic speech against a tenured psychology professor, Charles Negy, who had—shockingly!—expressed opinions on his personal Twitter account that didn’t comport with the campus orthodoxy.

Remember: UCF is a public university, which means they’re obligated to uphold the First Amendment. And when disciplinary actions that

reek of retribution are brought against staff and faculty, that has a chilling effect on the students at that school. If that's how UCF would treat a tenured faculty member for having the audacity to express an alternate viewpoint, how would they treat a lowly undergraduate student without the power of tenure and an employee union behind him or her?



With cancel culture running rampant throughout higher education, it seems that litigation might be the only thing that will make these institutions live up to their stated commitments to free speech and expression.

At Smith, Shaw said about her resignation, "...I chose the right to continue to discuss and talk about what's going on at Smith College and I retain the right to file a legal claim in a U.S. court of law against Smith College... and that's what I intend to do." And at UCF, Negy outlined his intentions to take legal action against the school for breach of contract and defamation.

While it's unclear how things will turn out with these ongoing lawsuits, there have been some significant court victories in favor of speech in recent years—which have resulted in a number of universities across the country reconsidering their toxic policies. The University of Texas, for example, dissolved its Campus Climate Response Team in a settlement agreement last December after being sued by Speech First, and the Board of Regents for Iowa's university system recently approved new recommendations made by an internal Free Speech Committee that was established last year after a series of lawsuits in a number of colleges in that state.

Cancel culture remains a major problem at schools—but at the very least, the threat (and financial burden) of legal action can help ensure that college administrations aren't complicit through their policies and actions. More importantly, these lawsuits help raise awareness among Americans about the divisive and statist tactics being used both on- and off-campus to silence students and suppress America's freedoms.