

## Student investigated for gender-neutral debate says professor banned laptops to target her

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*Secretly recording meeting with professors ‘created a climate of suspicion’*

Lindsay Shepherd **recorded a meeting** where two professors and a diversity office staffer told the graduate student she had threatened undergraduates by showing a debate on gender-neutral pronouns in class.

Now one of Shepherd’s professors is allegedly afraid that she’ll be Shepherd’s next target for outing.

Tensions are growing at Canada’s Wilfrid Laurier University, particularly in Shepherd’s academic department, as her voice becomes more influential in the international conversation about academic freedom and gender politics.

The journalism professor who has emerged as her most vocal defender even claimed Shepherd has been preemptively shunned from the administration’s new task force on freedom of expression, formed in response to the controversy engulfing her and the school.

Shepherd told *The College Fix* in an email Tuesday that “unfortunately” her decision to go public with her treatment in the department “created a climate of suspicion and mistrust.”

*‘She said straight-up she doesn’t want me to record her’*

Earlier Tuesday, the last day of class before two study days and end-of-semester exams, Shepherd claimed her professor told her to “put away my laptop” in her **graduate-level course** on “approaches to cultural analysis.”

“I pointed out we are allowed to have them to take notes as per the syllabus,” she **tweeted**. “After I pressed the issue, she said straight-up she doesn’t want me to record her.”

Responding to tweet comments, **Shepherd said** she had arrived late and learned her professor, Alicia Sliwinski, apparently made the no-laptop announcement to the entire class. Sliwinski “merely shrugged” when Shepherd asked her when the “new rule” was enacted, the grad student claimed.

“The whole point is that I am not recording,” **she responded** to a critic. “I’m just being treated with suspicion; as if I were recording.”

Sliwinski is an associate professor of global studies and graduate faculty in cultural analysis and social theory. She did not respond to phone and email inquiries from *The Fix* Tuesday.

**MORE: WLU regrets telling TA she broke law by showing a debate**



**Lindsay Shepherd** @NewWorldHominin

Prof of my CQ602 grad course just told me to put away my laptop in class. I pointed out we are allowed to have them to take notes as per the syllabus. After I pressed the issue, she said straight-up she doesn't want me to record her.

[2:14 PM - Dec 5, 2017](#)

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Shepherd told *The Fix* that “for the most part” her graduate student colleagues “are not supportive” of her in the midst of the controversy.

“To some extent I extend my sympathy to them, as I realize it may be awkward,” she said. “However, it is unfortunate that they feel the need to ‘pick a side’ and alienate me.”

That’s because freedom of expression is a “non-partisan issue that should actually provide common ground and bring people together as a universal principle,” Shepherd said.

She was at first “overwhelmed” by the attention spurred by her recording and pressure she’s now under, but she is determined to “stick it out” because “this is something I really care about.” Shepherd did not immediately answer a followup query about how specifically her student colleagues are not supportive and how they are treating her.

**MORE: ‘I wonder if my mere presence is simply too triggering now’**

*Shepherd was ‘not invited to sit on’ free speech task force*

Journalism professor David Haskell, who introduced Shepherd at a **free speech rally** in her honor, responded to her tweet about Sliwinski’s new laptop ban by adapting a **verse** from the Book of Romans.

“For [recorders] hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong,” wrote Haskell, whose primary research field is the sociology of religion. (The Apostle Paul was exhorting early Christians to obey the very rulers who were persecuting them.)

On Monday, **Haskell claimed** that Shepherd was “not invited to sit on” the new task force on freedom of expression, “though she is its reason for it being created.”

Haskell said professors’ nominations for the task force were closed Nov. 30 “but then later reopened by admin.” He asked rhetorically if the administration needed “more time to stack the deck?”

The journalism professor did not respond to inquiries by *The Fix* but **promised** to make public “facts to support the claim ... by week’s end.”

**MORE: Prof who shuns gender-neutral pronouns crowdfunds \$50k monthly**



**DavidMillardHaskell**@DMillardHaskell

New devlpmnts on the WLU front: at this point @NewWorldHominin is not invited to sit on the U's Free Expression Task Force though she is its reason for it being created. Prof nominations for the TF closed Nov 30 but then later reopened by admin (need more time to stack the deck?)

[12:05 PM - Dec 4, 2017](#)

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WLU President Deborah MacLatchy **announced Nov. 21** the task force was being assembled in specific response to Shepherd’s secretly recorded meeting with the three officials.

**Two days later**, MacLatchy said the task force would “seek input from all points of view” at Laurier. She **reiterated** after the free speech rally for Shepherd that “we look forward to opportunities to include all perspectives” on the task force.

The administration has not announced the full list of task force members and did not immediately respond to inquiries by *The Fix* to the listed contact for the task force.

Shepherd’s meeting, which had **possible disciplinary consequences**, was itself convened in response to an anonymous complaint about Shepherd showing her Communications Studies 101 undergraduates a debate between Jordan Peterson, the University of Toronto psychology professor who disdains gender-neutral pronouns, and a critic on Canadian television.

*Her lawyer denounces ‘spirit of political correctness shackling free speech’*

Asked how the controversy could affect her future and her career, Shepherd told *The Fix* “I don’t know, to be honest.”

**She also said** employment and labor lawyer Howard Levitt is representing her. He has **publicly said** that WLU “should be so fundamentally embarrassed by its policies and its conduct” toward Shepherd.

Levitt told *The Fix* in an email Tuesday that he’s representing her because her case is “about the freedom of every student and faculty member in Canadian universities and colleges.”

“The spirit of political correctness which is shackling free speech and intellectual rigour in colleges and universities in this country and beyond is antithetical to not only the mandate of” WLU but to the principles of academic freedom, he said.

“What occurs in this case will be the litmus test for intellectual liberation on campuses,” and if Shepherd is indeed disciplined for her classroom behavior, students in her mold “will be cowed into submission to the detriment of us all.”

**MORE: Jordan Peterson coincidentally loses first research grant ever**

Shepherd published what is apparently her first full-length opinion piece on the controversy Monday in the *National Post*.

She said one of the research topics she offered her Communications Studies 101 undergraduates was “communication bubbles,” in which people become “entrapped in ideological echo chambers as a result of only seeking out, or being fed, news that confirms their existing beliefs.”

Shepherd showed her students the Peterson debate precisely to help them “break out of communication bubbles and decide for oneself whether an argument is valid or not,” which creates the conditions for the “marketplace of ideas,” another subject in the undergraduate course.

The “intellectual beating” she received in the secretly recorded meeting “revealed that these educators don’t believe critical thinking matters, or that they fear students exercising critical thought might lead them to politically incorrect conclusions,” Shepherd wrote.

She issued a challenge to the administration and students: adopt a free-speech statement like the University of Chicago’s, and “take a year off” and only return to the university when students are “ready for dialogue and debate.”

Shepherd apologized for “staying silent for fear of expressing ideas that could make me a pariah among the authoritarian left” before this incident. But she is done with silence: “I feel more free than I have felt in a long time.”

**MORE: [Transgender activists attack professor who won’t say ‘ze’](#)**