

Laurier apologizes to TA Lindsay Shepherd after she aired debate clip on gender-neutral pronouns



Wilfrid Laurier University is seen on Sept. 12, 2014.

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Wilfrid Laurier University has apologized to a teaching assistant who was reprimanded for playing a video debating gender pronouns after the school was questioned about its commitment to academic freedom.

Lindsay Shepherd, a graduate student at the university, was told by faculty that her lesson material was transphobic after she played a video of a debate between two University of Toronto professors over the use of gender-neutral pronouns. The video featured Jordan Peterson, who has received wide media coverage for his refusal to use pronouns other than "he" or "she" when referring to transgender and gender-fluid people.

The university apologized to Ms. Shepherd on Tuesday, after a recording of a meeting with Ms. Shepherd and her superiors was released. Ms. Shepherd says one faculty

member told her that a neutral approach to the debate clip was similar to having a neutral opinion of Adolf Hitler.

"After listening to this recording, an apology is in order," said Deborah MacLatchy, president and vice-chancellor of Laurier, in a statement. "The conversation I heard does not reflect the values and practices to which Laurier aspires. I am sorry it occurred in the way that it did and I regret the impact it had on Lindsay Shepherd."

Nathan Rambukkana, the professor in Ms. Shepherd's class who reprimanded her, also apologized, saying that the meeting, which was organized as a panel of three faculty staff, may have come off more intimidating than he would have liked.

"This entire occasion and hearing from so many with passionate views on this issue from across the political spectrum has made me seriously rethink some of the positions I took in the meeting," Mr. Rambukkana said.

"I'm sorry this came to pass the way it did and look forward to moving past this and continue working with you as my TA and perhaps in the future."

Ms. Shepherd posted her reaction on Twitter, saying that the university was still ambiguous about free speech.

"Moral of the story: A university must be repeatedly publicly shamed, internationally, in order to apologize," Ms. Shepherd said in a tweet.

"Also, make sure to secretly record all meetings or they won't take you seriously."

Ms. Shepherd has said she originally played the clip in a communications class to highlight the complexities of grammar. She said university staff told her that it was a form of gendered violence to show the video without prefacing that the content was offensive and said that she should have first condemned Mr. Peterson's refusal to use gender-neutral pronouns.

The university has said that an independent party will look into how the situation was handled and to ensure that an "enriched learning environment" is preserved at the school in the future.

With a report from The Canadian Press