

LGBT center was behind complaint against TA who showed class gender-neutral pronoun debate

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<https://www.thecollegefix.com/post/39913/>



‘We’re not there to do any deep-dive critical thinking’

There have been a few outstanding questions since graduate student Lindsay Shepherd was investigated and threatened with discipline for exposing her undergraduate communications students to a televised debate on gender-neutral pronouns.

Chief among them: Who filed the complaint against her? The answer could determine whether Canada’s Wilfrid Laurier University broke its own rules to investigate her.

Thanks to a lengthy and eye-opening *Maclean’s* feature, we now know: It wasn’t technically a student.

Specifically, it was campus LGBTQ office *acting on a tip* from a student:

Toby Finlay, an administrator at the Rainbow Centre, wouldn’t share the specifics of the conversation due to confidentiality reasons, but adds: “It was through us that they made the complaint that led to the situation that blew up in the media.”

Given this curious method, it's hard to see how WLU can investigate Shepherd for violating its "gendered and sexual violence policy" under its own procedures.

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



Lindsay Shepherd@NewWorldHominin

Breaking news: The informal "complaint" was made through the WLU Rainbow Centre.

Who knows what kind of spin those WLU Rainbow activists put on the initial "complaint"...<http://www.macleans.ca/lindsay-shepherd-wilfrid-laurier/> ...
[9:14 PM - Dec 11, 2017](#)



[Inside Lindsay Shepherd's controversial battle over free speech on campus](#)

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That issue is for Shepherd's lawyer, however. What will delight you about the article is Shepherd's family debates as a child:

At the dinner table, the family discussed "things like biological determinism versus free will," [mother and schoolteacher] Jennifer says. "Or gender roles and whether they're constructed or not. Or the benefits of organized religion. I've tried to guide

her to see things from all different perspectives and I've tried not to lead her in any one direction."

And her unexpected defenders at the free-speech rally she addressed:

Alex McEwin, a second-year undergrad at the University of Waterloo, holds a sign that says: "This tranny loves free speech." "People should not be assumed to be transphobic by trying to open debate," he says. ...

McEwin is standing towards the back of the crowd. He says he's afraid to be out there holding this sign and that his own queer and trans community will be angry at him when they see pictures of him at the rally. But he feels this needs to be said. "I think that queer and trans people should not be assumed to be part of any specific belief. We should be allowed to have our own opinions as individuals."

What will depress you is what Shepherd's professors and peers have to say about her – at least, those who are willing to be quoted by name.

Celebrity tweets over 'controversial discussion'

The article reveals that a bunch of students and faculty in Shepherd's department would only talk if they got to stay anonymous and answer questions in writing. *Maclean's* reporter Aaron Hutchins refused to go along.

It might have been a mistake in retrospect for those few who agreed to go on the record in phone interviews.

Student and fellow TA Vivek Ramesh was actually being coached by "voices in the background" who were "whispering responses to him," according to Hutchins. In their next interview (sans whispers), Ramesh made clear what he thinks students should spend their first two years doing:

"If we do anything as TAs to alienate any students, we've failed in our job as a TA and our duties in these entry-level communications courses," he says. "We're there

to help to level the playing field in terms of writing. We're not there to generate controversial discussion and do any deep-dive critical thinking. That's what upper-year courses are for."

MORE: Lindsay Shepherd may lose her job

I'm not sure that Ramesh realizes how bad he's making all TAs look (with the exception of Shepherd), as well as *the entire department*:

Ramesh says the larger issue is a lack of guidance for TAs from professors. "In order to generate interest—because grammar is a boring topic—[other TAs] were doing things like dissecting celebrity tweets and fixing the grammar and structure," he says. "The kind of content [Shepherd] brought in was definitely inappropriate. [...]
At no point should your discussion devolve into should gender fluid and trans people's identity come into question."

So let's get this straight: An entire department is teaching undergraduates about *celebrity tweets* rather than substantive issues of the day *in their very field of communications*.

Unprofessional behavior by department chair

Others in the department pretty much blame Shepherd for having the temerity to defend herself by secretly recording her meeting with professors Nathan Rambukkana (her supervisor) and Herbert Pimlott, the head of her program, along with a diversity office staffer, Adria Joel. (*Maclean's* reveals it was her mom's idea.)

It goes beyond **one of Shepherd's professors** who suspects she's secretly recording everything now.

Her department chair, Peter Urquhart, got snarky with reporter Hutchins, telling him to consult Shepherd for a recording of the day Urquhart planted himself in the class she teaches. Urquhart has no evidence she recorded anything – he's simply trying to impugn her with a reporter.

MORE: Professor bans laptops to prevent Shepherd from recording her

His predecessor Jonathan Finn also plays down the severity of Rambukkana telling Shepherd that she broke Canada's gender-identity discrimination law by showing clips from a TV debate: Finn calls it a "small mistake."

Right, baselessly and recklessly telling a TA she could be prosecuted *for her classroom instruction* is a "small mistake."

Kudos to reporter Hutchins for doing a thorough, fair and sensitive story on a difficult subject that is worth reading in full. Student journalists would do well to use this piece as a guide for their own campus coverage of thorny cultural issues.

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MORE: ['I wonder if my mere presence is simply too triggering now'](#)