

# Laurier's gendered violence policy must be revised

As for respecting diversity, under the gendered and sexual violence policy, all views are welcome, so long as they are not all expressed, no matter how reasonably.

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The public's reaction to the treatment of a Wilfrid Laurier University grad student at the hands of two professors and a rep from the university's Diversity and Equity Office (DEO) has been one of horror and outrage. The resounding opinion was that student, Lindsay Shepherd, was completely in the right when she offered both sides of a debate involving the use of non-gender pronouns.

And while the public has agreed Shepherd was right, she wasn't. At least not according to a disturbing regulatory policy enforced by my university. In fact, in the meeting where Lindsay was subject to a verbal inquisition, Adria Joel, the DEO rep, cites the policy, known as Laurier's gendered and sexual violence policy (GSVP) as justification for her claim that Lindsay was guilty of "spreading transphobia."

Though clearly the hammer used to beat Lindsay into submission, in my university's official communications with the public on the controversy, mention of the GSVP has been strangely absent.

In her letter of apology to Shepherd, Laurier's president does not mention this policy. Rather, her apology only concerns the "conversation," "the way the meeting was conducted," and some unspecified "processes." When she could have taken the opportunity to take a strong stand for uncensored free inquiry — what should be the core value of a university — Laurier's president suggested that she needs a task force to help her understand how Laurier can balance freedom of expression against other values.

While Laurier's president is avoiding talking about the Gendered and Sexual Violence Policy, I won't.

The policy has its roots in government legislation. Ontario's Bill 132, passed in 2016, required universities to have a policy on sexual violence. That law defined "sexual violence" in terms of assault and harassment "targeting a person's sexuality, gender identity or gender expression." This is laudable; harassment and assault are wrong (and I condemn in advance anyone who would use this letter as justification for harassing or threatening anyone).

Apparently not satisfied with a definition of sexual violence that was good enough for the Wynne Liberal government, Laurier's board of governors approved a policy that innovated by creating the following definition of gendered violence:

"An act or actions that reinforce gender inequalities resulting in physical, sexual, emotional, economic or mental harm. This violence includes sexism, gender discrimination, gender harassment, biphobia, transphobia, homophobia and heterosexism, intimate partner violence, and forms of Sexual Violence. This violence can take place on any communication platform (e.g., graffiti, online environments, and through the use of phones)."

Unlike the Wynne Liberals' definition, Laurier's "gendered violence" doesn't just prohibit harassment and assault, it prohibits ideas.

It seems Shepherd hadn't studied this definition before entering the meeting where she was reprimanded. If she had, she'd have realized there was no point arguing about her intentions, or whether she targeted anyone. All it takes to commit an act of gendered violence according to Laurier's GSVP is for a listener to experience "emotional harm."

Further, had Shepherd wanted to attempt the (impossible?) task of proving that her accuser had not suffered "emotional harm," she couldn't because Laurier said her accuser(s) identity was confidential.

No one should comfort themselves by thinking that these concerns are limited to Lindsay Shepherd. Every student who registers at Laurier in any of its programs, tacitly agrees to have their personal conduct regulated by the GSVP: in tutorial, in

lecture, online, “when on University property or when off campus,” and regardless of the “time of the incident (e.g., evenings, weekends, and holidays).” The sanctions approved by Laurier’s board include disciplinary warning, behavioural contract, suspension, and expulsion.

As for respecting diversity, under the GSVP all views are welcome, so long as they are not all expressed, no matter how reasonably. Inclusion? Violate this orthodoxy, anywhere, anytime, and a fellow student may see that you are included in an investigation under the GSVP.

When Laurier announced the details of its task force on academic freedom last Thursday there was still no mention of the GSVP. The task force is only directed to recommend “a statement on freedom of expression.”

If Laurier really wants to make a statement about its commitment to freedom of expression it will remove its ideological definition of gendered violence from the GSVP, now.

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