

Wilfrid Laurier graduate student delivers a wake-up call



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<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/lindsay-shepherd-delivers-a-wake-up-call/article37033031/>

If you want to understand the intellectual corruption that is eating away at our universities, listen to an audio recording made by a graduate student named Lindsay Shepherd. She is a 22-year-old teaching assistant at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario. Every senior administrator and every governor at every campus in the country should listen to it and ask themselves how far the rot has spread.

Ms. Shepherd is doing a master's degree in cultural analysis and social theory. Two weeks ago, she was summoned for a reprimand after a student, or students, complained about offensive material she had introduced in class. She decided to record the meeting on her computer instead of taking notes. Afterward, she took her story to the media, where it hit the headlines. She didn't think about releasing the recording until Global News learned that it existed and asked her for it. It broadcast an abridged version, which went viral. The reaction was widespread shock. Now, the university has a full-blown crisis on its hands.

"I would hate to be them right now," Ms. Shepherd told me Sunday night. "But they deserve it."

In the meeting, Ms. Shepherd is confronted by three superiors who bully her, ignore her version of the story and attempt to intimidate her with veiled accusations. At times, she is reduced to tears. The power imbalance is extreme. The resemblance to a Maoist struggle session – where party zealots gang up on a wrong-thinker and try to force her to confess the error of her ways – is painful.

During the interrogation, Ms. Shepherd is told repeatedly that she is guilty of spreading transphobia – in violation of the university's policy and also, most likely, of Ontario's human-rights code. At one point her supervisor, Nathan Rambukkana, compares her

actions to endorsing white supremacy. "This is like neutrally playing a speech by Hitler," he tells her.

What did Ms. Shepherd do? She played a three-minute video clip from a TV program that had been broadcast on TVO. It featured a debate over transgender pronouns. The role of Hitler was played by Jordan Peterson, the notorious University of Toronto professor who has thrown the entire academic world into conniption fits with his alleged hate thoughts. Among other things, Prof. Peterson argues that Ontario's human-rights code could compel people to use non-gendered artificial pronouns – a position that Ms. Shepherd's superiors at WLU evidently share.

Ms. Shepherd attempted to explain that she doesn't even agree with Prof. Peterson. She simply used the clip to help frame a class discussion – an explanation that her interrogators ignored. When she asked which students had complained and how many, she was told that information was confidential. When she pointed out that the pronoun controversy has already been widely aired in public, she was told that some ideas are too "problematic" to be introduced into the classroom. When she voiced her opinion that universities should be places for debate, she was told that she's created a toxic environment for students. When she said she had remained neutral and not tried to impose her own views, her supervisor, Prof. Rambukkana, told her, "That's kind of part of the problem."

For the record, her other two adversaries were Herbert Pimlott, a tenured associate professor in communications studies, and Adria Joel, who holds the unwieldy title of acting manager of gendered violence prevention and support at the university's diversity and equity office. Although outranked and outnumbered, Ms. Shepherd emerged with dignity from this ugly confrontation. Her voice broke only a few times. To her immense credit, she refused to give in. "I thought, if this is something that can cause you to lose your teaching-assistant job, then I don't want to be here," she told me.

Ms. Shepherd didn't set out to be a whistle-blower. She simply believes in calling bullshit when she sees it. And what she sees are students and faculty who are shut down or censored if they don't toe the party line. What she sees are burgeoning enforcement apparatuses for speech and conduct that, in the name of "diversity" and "equity," sometimes make genuine academic inquiry all but impossible. What she sees are university leaders who are hostage to the righteous insanities of the day.

Laurier alumni – as well as lots of other people – are rightly outraged at what happened to Ms. Shepherd. Which doesn't mean that anything will change. So far, the university has mustered no more than the usual anodyne response, complete with the promise of a task force to explore the "complex" issues of academic expression.

In the meantime, the underlying rot goes unaddressed. Large parts of academic life – as well as of administration – have been captured by far-left groupthink. "The problem doesn't come from this one incident," Ms. Shepherd says. "It's also reflected in the classes I take. Basically, they're all about identity politics."

And no, these issues are really not complex at all. Ms. Shepherd deserves a heartfelt apology and an honorary degree for her courage and her common sense. "Maybe this will be a wake-up call," she says hopefully. If it is, we'll have her to thank.