

Western University: 'Racist' Western Lives Matter poster at homecoming being investigated



By [Dan Brown](#), The London Free Press
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<http://www.lfpress.com/2016/10/04/western-university-the-school-in-a-statement-on-racist-signage-says-its-investigating-online-images-and-slogans-that-traded-over-the-weekend-on-social-media>



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[Western University](#)

Western University has come out swinging against what it calls a “repugnant” misuse of the Black Lives Matter slogan that was shared online over the weekend, when defiant students held a homecoming bash.

In a statement Tuesday, a school executive said Western was made aware “of a number of images, symbols and slogans that were shared by Western community members through social media over the past weekend.”

Specifically cited were “images of a banner with the slogan ‘Western Lives Matter,’” with school vice-president Jana Luker saying it “has produced outrage and backlash within our community.”

The image showed four Western-shirted young men posing in front of a sheet-like sign, with Western Lives Matter written across it in the school’s trademark purple colour.

Black Lives Matter is an international movement against violence and racism toward black people, one that has especially been fueled by recent police shootings of African-Americans in the United States.

“‘Black Lives Matter’ is an important human rights movement and a powerful response to systemic racism that permeates our society,” Luker, vice-president for student experience, said in the statement. “Co-opting the ‘Lives Matter’ phrase in this way is repugnant and trivializes the validity of this international cause and network.”

The school is investigating whether those involved violated its student code of conduct, Luker wrote.

Thousands of Western students held an unsanctioned homecoming celebration over the weekend, after the school rescheduled the event to three weeks later in a bid to nix unruly and booze-fueled behaviour.

In a video posted to Facebook, the head of Western’s undergraduate student government, Eddy Avila, said he could not let the offending banner go unrecognized.

“Equating the student upheaval (stemming from) the Homecoming date change to the Black Live Matter movement — which represents years of pain, oppression and violence — is the epitome of ignorance and privilege. And it essentially belittles their entire movement. We have to be aware that some people’s lives depend on protest, that some are fighting for some very basic human right. We have to be aware of the social and historical context of struggle,” Avila said.

“Never be afraid to stand up for what you believe in,” he added, but cautioned students to “use your voice wisely.” He said the banner affected how Western students are viewed.

London has come under a harsh national spotlight recently for behaviour with racial overtones, including when the N-word was hurled on a public street at a black actor playing in a stage production about American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.,

and again when a Muslim woman was spat upon in a supermarket and an attempt made to pull off the hijab covering her head.

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WESTERN UNIVERSITY
OCTOBER 4, 2016**

Statement on racist signage in community

Western University has been made aware of a number of images, symbols and slogans that were shared by Western community members through social media over the past weekend.

Specifically images of a banner with the slogan 'Western Lives Matter' has produced outrage and backlash within our community. 'Black Lives Matter' is an important human rights movement and a powerful response to systemic racism that permeates our society. Co-opting the 'Lives Matter' phrase in this way is repugnant and trivializes the validity of this international cause and network.

Western does not tolerate racism. Western University considers the 'Western Lives Matter' banner to be contrary to the university's values. In conjunction with Campus Community Police Service (CCPS) and London Police Service (LPS), Western is investigating this matter to determine whether individuals involved will be dealt with under Western's Code of Student Conduct.

Senior administration wants to assure the entire Western community that these types of transgressions are hurtful, disrespectful and demeaning. They do, however, provide an opportunity for further conversations with campus leaders and community partners.

Western's administration, along with the University Students' Council (USC), Society of Graduate Students (SOGS) and Western's Equity and Human Rights Services, will work collaboratively with campus and community individuals and groups to create opportunities to examine issues of racism on campus and to further engage in conversation and learning in a productive manner.

As a start, I'd like to acknowledge the video released by USC President Eddy Avila in response to the images from the weekend that included racist sentiments. Western is supportive of his message and looks forward to work in partnership with students to clarify and promote a more positive community environment.

**Jana Luker
Associate Vice-President (Student Experience)
Western University**