

From: Riddle, Megan <mriddle@coloradomesa.edu>
Sent time: 03/08/2025 02:30:21 PM
To: Marshall, John </o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cb2db966909c4d0db4cd3f4a72fe93de-marshall>
Cc:
BCc:
Subject: Re: Free Expression and Our Campus Values

8 March, 2025

Dear President Marshall,

I write to you today to ask you to reconsider your decision to allow Jared Taylor to speak on campus later this month. Although your email did not mention him by name, it is not difficult to discover his invitation by the Western Culture Club. I would like to focus specifically on your consideration of CMU's principles of free speech.

In your email, you address Taylor as a "controversial speaker." Let us be direct. He is a white supremacist espousing racist ideology. I propose that CMU has a higher obligation than, as your email says, "to allow space for all opinions across the political and ideological spectrum." CMU's mission is "to provide an affordable and accessible education and form meaningful and mutually enriching partnerships that support the well-being and vibrancy of our community." White supremacy damages the well-being and vibrancy of our community.

The first amendment right to free speech protects an individual's beliefs and words from *government interference*. Racists are not jailed. They are not fined. An individual can think and purport white supremacist ideology without legal recourse. However, to extend them space and a microphone on our campus actively infuses this perspective with power and visibility. This in turn empowers students considering racist actions. It sends the message that the University prioritizes the extremely optional invitation of a club over the non-negotiable safety and inclusion of students of color.

CMU intends to be known as a Hispanic-serving institution. It actively recruits Latino students, making promises that our diverse community is reflected on campus. Supporting white supremacists, even while sending emails washing your hands of this responsibility, jeopardizes the safety of racially vulnerable students.

Your email says, "CMU's role isn't to dictate to student clubs, or faculty, who they can invite and what content they present." I disagree. The line is *somewhere*. CMU would not support a hypothetical speaker who espoused child abuse. Or dog fighting. What about a eugenics proponent who is anti-disability? At some point, your office would say no. CMU *HAS* to dictate to student clubs and faculty who is and is not allowed on campus because it is the privilege and responsibility of campus admin to oversee the protection of ALL students.

Please remove the invitation for this speaker. Remember the mission of CMU and that the values of safety and an atmosphere of learning must take highest priority.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to meet at your convenience to discuss this further.

Megan Riddle

LLMC Department

Escalante 213

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From: Marshall, John <marshall@coloradomesa.edu>
Sent: Friday, March 7, 2025 8:12 AM
To: Marshall, John <marshall@coloradomesa.edu>
Subject: Free Expression and Our Campus Values

Dear Campus,

A campus student club has proposed and invited a speaker to campus who doesn't align with my values, is at odds with our campus values and holds views that everyone I know will find abhorrent.

This proposed speaking engagement could be the most difficult and important test CMU has faced when it comes to free speech, free expression and civility through our [shared values](#) of love, dignity, resilience, humility, courage, curiosity and power.

I believe we are a Human Scale University (a model of the world we want to create) when we are a place where all ideas can be expressed, bad ideas can be peacefully challenged, and in the end, defeated.

There are a few items I want to address campus-wide as we anticipate this upcoming test of our values and free speech principles.

The issue of platforming or deplatforming: This speaker has been invited by students of a campus student club. CMU's role isn't to dictate to student clubs, or faculty, who they can invite and what content they present. Our job as a university is not to "platform" or "deplatform" speakers invited by students or faculty. Our task is to empower you to pursue truth, create space for civil (nonviolent) disagreement whereby we can all continue to refine our understanding of the world and follow our conscience. Part of how we do this is by understanding arguments we find reprehensible. And of course, the only way to learn this is to allow space for all opinions across the political and ideological spectrum—those we agree with fully, partially or not at all.

The reason for the First Amendment of the Constitution is, in part, to avoid silencing political minorities and dissidents. We accomplish this by defending the rights and freedoms of political minorities with the same fortitude as the rights and freedoms of the majority. Once we head down the path of canceling speakers with whom we disagree, who is to decide where that starts and stops? The obvious yet uncomfortable answer is that we must defend the political speech of others (and those with whom we disagree) in order to protect our own (and that with which we agree).

I will acknowledge that controversial and offensive speakers test the limits of our civility. It is difficult to abide ideas and speech that denigrate human beings. But for my part, I intend to use this as an opportunity to reinforce and live out our values—specifically by drawing attention to how racism in all its forms cuts directly at our values of love and dignity.

Last year, [CMU was visited by the former Director of the ACLU Nadine Strossen](#). Nadine, who literally wrote the book on free speech, spoke powerfully about the importance of civil liberties as well as her time as President of the Americans for Civil Liberties Union. The organization she represented is perhaps most famous for one of their lawyers, who was Jewish, yet defended the speech rights of a neo-Nazi demonstration, because it was the same legal principle that allowed Dr. King to march in Selma. This historic case is one of our nation's most dramatic instances of such commitment to speech and expression rights, but it is far from the only one.

Closer to home, the CMU Board of Trustees adopted [free speech principles](#) using the [Chicago Principles](#) for Free Expression and Open Discourse as the framework for that policy. This resolution is, alongside the First Amendment of the Constitution, the governing policy used to allow students and faculty to invite speakers to campus without fear of silencing or censoring.

Now, a moment of personal reflection: Serving as a university president is among the most rewarding opportunities of public service that exist. Every day, I get to interact with the most remarkable and inspiring students and the most curious, courageous and intellectually gifted faculty you'll find. Indeed, serving CMU as president makes each day a meaningful adventure. Once in a while, the role includes making very tough decisions, and following our values and free speech principles in this case isn't easy. Denying the student request to allow a controversial speaker to visit CMU in the face of outcry would be an easier decision. But doing so will not advance what our campus has determined is sacred.

I, for one, plan not to attend his speech but I do plan to be there to peacefully and respectfully demonstrate our values. For the students inviting him, my hope for you is that you are able to carefully listen and critically examine his arguments and that you come to see the vileness of his views as you progress through your educational journeys. For those students who choose to attend, I believe it's the opportunity of your life to peacefully and respectfully demonstrate kindness, goodness, manifest our campus values, and to carefully deconstruct his dehumanizing ideas.

Thank you for walking with me in the expression of our values and our striving for a Human Scale University.

Best,

John Marshall
President
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