

President's Decision
In Response to Events Policy Appeal
Regarding the Invitation of Mr. Ben Shapiro to Gonzaga University
By the Gonzaga University College Republicans

Event Proposal

In October of 2018, the Gonzaga University College Republicans submitted a proposal to bring Mr. Ben Shapiro, a political commentator, lawyer and writer,¹ to speak at Gonzaga University in Spring, 2019. The proposal was reviewed by the Vice President for Student Development, the designated authority identified in the University's Events Policy.

The Vice President for Student Development, after conferring with numerous colleagues including those in Campus Security and Public Safety, did not approve the request, citing safety concerns with the proposed venue, as well as concerns related to Mr. Shapiro's appearance at some other institutions, such as verbal and physical altercations between protesting individuals and groups.² These, in turn, gave rise to the concern that Mr. Shapiro's appearance could contribute to the creation of a hostile environment, particularly for those members of our community who may be targeted for discrimination, ridicule, or harassment by others.

On December 20th, 2018, I received a letter from the President of the College Republicans appealing the original decision by the Vice President for Student Development. Resumption of the Spring semester allowed for an engaged review of this appeal.

On the Matter of Safety & Risk Management

Where an event or activity involves any degree of real or perceived controversy, it is incumbent upon the institution to effectively assess and prepare to manage the risks involved.

The GUCR proposal, submitted through the campus activities portal, specifically identified the Hemmingson Center Ballroom as the specific and exclusive venue for the event. As part of the evaluation of the GUCR proposal, a campus safety assessment was conducted by Campus Security and Public Safety. This assessment determined that the location posed significant security challenges due to ingress/egress and building perimeter management limitations. A related concern emerging from the campus safety assessment focused upon the management of possible protest behavior in, around, or near the proposed venue. The decision communicated by the Vice President for Student Development on November 15th, 2018 was made following a review of the facts available at that time: those presented by the College Republicans as well as the conclusions drawn from the initial campus safety assessment. Since that time additional facts have emerged that obligate a further review and analysis.

Following the original decision (and in anticipation of an appeal of it) an in-depth risk assessment of the proposed event – which includes input from a group of law enforcement agencies – was conducted and completed in early January 2019. The results of that assessment – coupled with the practical examination of the logistics involved with managing the event – reinforced concerns about holding the event at the Hemmingson Center, but determined that other campus facilities might, under the appropriate circumstances, be appropriate for this event.

¹ <https://www.dailywire.com/authors/ben-shapiro>

² For example, at UC Berkeley, Ohio State, USC.

Institutional Context

Gonzaga University is and represents itself to be an *independent, faith-based and mission-centered* institution of American higher education and, as such, works consistently to provide its students with a learning environment reflective of those characteristics. Academic freedom is enshrined within the Faculty Handbook. The commitment to provide and support opportunities for exposure to a broad range of ideas is not only embedded in the curriculum, but espoused by the faculty who are responsible for providing it. Gonzaga University is proud of the diverse range of speakers and events that are invited to campus on a regular basis throughout the year.

Alongside the commitment to authentic intellectual endeavor, the University's Mission Statement underscores *values-based commitments* that are common to Catholic, Jesuit universities – specifically “. . . dignity of the human person, social justice, diversity, intercultural competence, global engagement, solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, and care for the planet.”³ We perceive these commitments as obligating community members to *act with respect* towards others, particularly those who are under-represented in the population. *This is another key hinge upon which decisions about events at an independent, mission-based university do and must turn.* As previous decisions about campus events have illustrated, these commitments (and particularly the way in which one might endeavor to define and achieve them) are subject to interpretation and can take a variety of forms. Many individuals who have been engaged in dialogue regarding the University's decision on Mr. Shapiro's appearance have observed that “diversity” ought to mean *diversity of (political) opinion*; that “intercultural competence” demands *engagement with difference*; and that “dignity of the human person” is a concept that applies equally to all persons – even those with whom one might vehemently disagree. Difference of opinion does not, however, connote, engender, or demand disrespect.

Gonzaga University – an independent, faith-based, and mission-centered university – reserves to itself the absolute right to host, or not host, any speaker or event for any reason or reasons that it determines may be in violation of its Mission, as reflected in its Events Policy. And therein lies the rub: the Events Policy articulates the basis upon which subjective, but responsible, judgments about the appropriateness of a given speaker or event are to be made. Sometimes, the specific characteristics of a proposed event bring our obligations as an intellectually broad-minded institution into conflict with our mission- and values-based responsibilities to our students and community members.

On a previous occasion involving an invited speaker to campus, I emphasized the fact that

“ . . . the Events Policy underscores the importance, as an academic community, of being able to “engage the full range of views on a variety of subjects” while simultaneously reserving to the administration the right to “impose conditions” intended to “ensure consistency with the standards” that have been described in section 1 of the Events Policy.” And later in the same paragraph: “A clear intention of the policy is to make the outright prohibition of a speaker's appearance on campus a decision of last resort.”⁴

For this reason, we overwhelmingly act in favor of permitting events and speakers to come to campus. At the same time, we reserve the right to make any speaker invitation to Gonzaga University

³ <https://www.gonzaga.edu/about/our-mission-jesuit-values/mission-statement-and-values>

⁴ President's Decision In Response to Events Policy Appeal Regarding the Appearance of Mr. Dinesh D'Souza at Gonzaga University, February 12, 2016.

contingent upon assurances that their remarks be respectful of all individuals and of the values reflected in our Mission Statement.

Review and Decision

This review process, which began in early January, has engaged numerous constituencies, including faculty, staff, and students. After several meetings with the Gonzaga University College Republicans leadership, it is clear that the club is open to changing the event venue to one that better allows the University to address appropriate security, event logistics, and attendee matters. The club has also worked to seek clarification regarding the topics Mr. Shapiro plans to speak about, a matter that was not clearly identified in the original event proposal and is a required element of the Events Policy review criteria.

Therefore, the Gonzaga University College Republicans are permitted to invite Mr. Shapiro to Gonzaga University, on the following conditions:

1. The GUCR will work with the Office of the Vice President for Student Development and/or her designee(s) to plan, promote, host and support the event in accordance with standard protocols for such events.
2. Given the interest in Mr. Shapiro's appearance and our history with previous events involving high-profile speakers that required heightened security, the student leadership and I have collectively determined that the most appropriate venue for such an event would be the McCarthy Athletic Center (MAC), and the Gonzaga University College Republicans – informed about the expense involved – have specifically requested that venue. (The Cataldo Hall location was also considered and discussed, and though less expensive, the attendance capacity limitations make this a less attractive option.) The University maintains a set of protocols at the MAC for hosting public events that include law enforcement and crowd management services to assure the safety of the speaker and all attendees, as well as the campus and surrounding environment. Part of doing so also requires that the event be ticketed. The promotional, staging, host management, technical and security costs associated with hosting a speaker at the MAC are clearly established. These costs are in addition to those charged by the Speaker. Other events hosted at this venue, such as the Presidential Speaker Series, have required sponsorships and a nominal attendance fee to cover those costs. These expenses are, ordinarily, in addition to those charged by the speaker or the speaker's agency and, as with other events of this type, Mr. Shapiro's appearance will be covered by ticket sales and/or (external) sponsor support.
3. As indicated in the Events Policy, the University's decision to invite a given speaker in no way implies approval or endorsement of the views expressed by the speaker or any aspect of the event. The University nonetheless strives to encourage even difficult or controversial topics in the context of civil discourse. The authorization granted to the Gonzaga University College Republicans, to invite Mr. Shapiro to campus, is made with the understanding that his remarks while at Gonzaga will be respectful of the University, its members, and of the values reflected in our Mission Statement.

Thayne M. McCulloh, D.Phil.
Gonzaga University President

February 4, 2019