



Class Discussion Feedback on the Draft Statement: Feedback from Faculty of Arts course

Recurring themes:

- Offensive v. harmful/hateful speech – distinction?
- Offensive speech can prevent other violent reactions
- Psychological and emotional harm of speech
- Inclusion and free speech – finding the balance
- Critiquing ideas v. attacking people or groups of people
- How to create conditions for genuine dialogue? What is the purpose of dialogue?
- Incitement to hatred – when does something qualify as incitement?

Notes from class discussion:

In the US, controversial rightwing speaker Milo Yiannopoulos ... tends to intentionally provoke reactions by saying controversial things about sensitive topics. The idea behind his approach is not to get people to agree with him, but to get people to talk about things.

It's important to make a statement about this. Everyone should be free to express [even controversial things] and to listen to all sides

Important to more strongly affirm the rights that free speech must be considered alongside

Edit the opening line "Freedom of expression matters. It fuels what good universities do."
Presumably, it fuels what all universities do

One definition of free speech I have heard is to be able to say anything you want without fear. Right now, some people have decided they don't want to hear some things... and there are restrictions on what one can talk about without fear... we should be sensitive to other feelings, but...

I would like to see how the statement defines and differentiates between offensive speech and hate speech

One should be able to say things that may offend people ... but not hurt ... so shouldn't say hateful things, although the line is hard to draw sometimes

Also, what type violence are talking about when we say that our speech shouldn't hurt people? Is it incitement to physical violence? Does psychological harm count as violence?

Could be clearer in affirming how certain forms of speech are themselves not conducive to free speech



The statement mentions the desire to create an inclusive environment while also upholding freedom of expression. How do we ensure that? Also, there is definitely a need to be able to have uncomfortable conversations

Regarding the UBC Free Speech Club: I once asked them how they draw the line [between free speech and hate speech] on a platform [Facebook] that is so open. I asked them: How do you moderate discussions? Do you moderate them? They didn't have a good answer for me.

People should be able to say potentially offensive things. Besides, may be debate and discussion is a good way to take down racist comments rather than censoring or silencing.

Regarding the anti-abortion campaign on campus: sometimes the things people say are not just comments ...some people feel mentally disturbed, may be someone has had to make a decision like that... and they feel attacked when graphic posters compare them to murderers - psychological harm (violence)

Some subjects have become taboo because of political correctness (e.g. religion, gender). The topics are important to talk about. If we censor speech ... it might lead to other acts that are violent [i.e. people might express themselves in violent ways]

When it says freedom of expression does not trump other rights, what are other rights that need protection ... and that need to be balanced with free speech?

I think it's important to have freedom of speech laws ...minorities have probably benefited from these laws more than anyone else. That's how the civil rights movement of the 60s achieved anything...

In response to above: sure, but what does this say about our societies if some individuals and groups need legally instituted measures to be able to exercise what is supposedly an inherent/fundamental right, whereas others don't need the law to intervene on their behalf because they can exercise their rights anyway?

My concern/question is if we do draw lines to limit freedom of speech, an implication of that is to give somebody the authority to regulate that ... but how do you regulate it [fairly]?

We probably need to differentiate between offense and harm. Somebody could say something offensive which one person could find deeply hurtful/harmful and another person [of the same group?] could be totally okay with it. So being harmed by something requires the person who is offended to engage with the comment or speech in a particular way...

Maybe we need also need to consider the difference between forcing someone to engage in awkward conversations by saying offensive things v. creating conditions for genuine conversation where people can feel free to express themselves



Utility of free speech: censoring offensive speech might not be a good way to change attitudes or beliefs... you could silence somebody, but that won't change their views... they still believe the same things, but just don't say them to you

There can be a lot of political correctness about somethings, which means one can't have discussions. For example, if you freely express your opinion and you're labelled [politically] left or right ... that's the end of the conversation...for example, if one says immigrants should assimilate into the culture of the host country, the person is not necessarily racist... they could have a reasonable explanation for their opinion, but political correctness doesn't allow that discussion to happen

Going back to the point about how censorship won't change beliefs: I don't think the purpose of dialogue is to change views. If you think the purpose to change the other person's beliefs, you're already coming in with convictions and precluding possibilities for self-reflection

Also, what is hate speech? There is a difference between attacking arguments and ideas v. attacking a person/people/groups. That said, since hate speech is still speech should we allow it anyway? No matter how repulsive it is?

In response to above: so then may be legal regulation of speech is not the best way ... or the only way to go about this... because the law or courts or other authorities can't teach people how to express criticism of ideas without attacking people or groups of people ... maybe people need to learn how to have conversations... may be its better to invest our efforts in developing the capacity for meaningful conversations

It's also important to note that you take things personally when it means a lot to you — how do you develop the ability to talk to someone you fundamentally disagree with? Or when the idea being attacked or critiqued is very important to you?

Professor: you all seem to demonstrate a deep appreciation for freedom of expression and genuine dialogue. And that reflects in the way we have discussed things in this class too... you have done a good job of thoughtfully expressing ideas on very controversial and challenging topics, and you also seem to know where to draw a line.

Someone looked up hate speech in Canada's (criminal code?) Section C319... Comments after that:

Wait doesn't that make it difficult to protest? For example, those who lead demonstrations against abortion... one could say they are inciting hatred... (refers to clinic shooting in the US)

Yes, but this section of the criminal code is not separate from the rest of the code... should be read as a part of the larger document. Need to establish direct connection between one person's hate speech and the hateful act someone commits because of it.