



Vancouver Pride Society

Statement RE: UBC and Pride

Background Information

Context

On June 23, 2019, Jenn Smith delivered a talk at UBC entitled “The Erosion of Freedom: How Transgender Politics in School and Society is Undermining Our Freedom and Harming Women & Children.” This talk, which is co-sponsored by the Canadian Christian Lobby, asserts that transgender women are men and that [SOGI 123](#) curriculum should not be taught in schools. Smith’s talks across British Columbia have targeted transgender women whom Smith labels as men.

Smith’s past talks have attracted alt-right hate groups, like the Soldiers of Odin and the Proud Boys. While Smith has stated he has not invited these groups, he has declined to denounce them. Smith’s talks at Douglas College and Trinity Western University were cancelled once the schools became aware of the nature of the bookings.

These talks are part of a growing rise of far-right rhetoric in Canada which target marginalized communities. Opponents of SOGI 123 have repeatedly targeted transgender women while opposing SOGI curriculum. This rhetoric is not benign; [Statistics Canada](#) reported a 47% rise in hate incidents from 2016 to 2017, with hate crimes targeting sexual orientation making up 10% of reported incidents. Hate crimes targeting sexual orientation (64%) are more likely to be violent. Vancouver is [listed ninth](#) in the top ten Canadian cities for hate crimes, with a recent increase in the number of reported crimes. **These numbers do not reflect unreported incidents.**

Response from the Campus Community

Numerous UBC groups requested the university intervene and cancel the room booking prior to the June 23 event.

A [letter](#) sent from the Association of Administrative + Professional Staff at UBC states that a large number of AAPS members have expressed that the presentation makes them feel “violated and/or unsafe as well as wholly disrespected by their employer.”

UBC Students Against Bigotry [note](#) that Smith is not the first far-right extremist to be permitted a platform at UBC, and express their concern that “it signals that any bigoted individual or group barred from other colleges and universities will be welcomed and protected at UBC,” which “amplifies and legitimizes oppressive and long-disproven ideas that directly result in violence against marginalized people.”

The UBC Alma Mater Society has [expressed](#) their concern that Smith’s talk would “stoke intolerance and discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, race, or an intersection of three,” which would lead to “students, faculty, and staff at UBC [feeling] threatened, unsafe, and targeted by his messaging.”

The UBC Faculty Association [expressed](#) concern about the impact of the event on their members and requested that UBC investigate and overturn the decision to provide Jenn Smith with a platform. Referencing the [UBC Respectful Environment Statement](#) which states that “freedom of expression...must be exercised responsibly, in ways that recognize the dignity of others,” the UBC Faculty Association wrote that “irresponsible, disrespectful, and discriminatory speech, including by non-UBC persons who have booked space on campus, harms the core academic activities of the UBC community.”

Response from UBC

A June 14, 2019 statement from the [Provost](#) prior to the June 23 event stated that “the university is deeply committed to the principles of equity, diversity, inclusion and maintaining a respectful environment,” and cited their [strategic plan](#) which calls for *Inclusion* as a key theme. UBC stated “unequivocally that the university values and celebrates our transgender and nonbinary students, faculty and staff, and stands behind their work in advancing safety and inclusion.”

Despite this statement, UBC goes on to defend providing a platform for hate speech, citing the 1976 Senate’s [Statement on Academic Freedom](#). UBC states “with respect to concerns that a speaker is engaging in hate speech, we note that hate speech is governed by the Criminal Code of Canada and specific concerns about it should therefore be directed to the local RCMP detachment. In respect to concerns about safety, UBC advised “they will be collaborating with the RCMP and other campus service providers.”

On July 2, 2019, President Santa Ono released a [letter](#) speaking to UBC’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. “We’re committed to keeping UBC a safe and respectful community,” writes President Ono, “I am deeply concerned that some members of our community are now questioning this.” President Ono confirms that the issue of balancing freedom of expression and academic freedom while committing to equity and inclusion will be on the Board of Governors’ meeting agenda. The Vancouver and Okanagan Senates will also be consulted.

VPS Response

UBC's statement that they unequivocally support and celebrate their transgender and nonbinary students and faculty is contradicted by their decision to provide a platform for anti-trans rhetoric.

Referring concerns to the police ignores the contemporary and historical oppression of marginalized people by police and complex relationship many LGBTQAI2S+ communities have with policing agencies. Trans and queer people, particularly those of colour, can not be assured safety in their interactions with police. Many marginalized people feel unsafe in police presence or when calling police to respond. Marginalized people can not be expected to rely on police for their safety.

Hate crime provisions were added to the criminal code after a rise of white supremacist and neo-Nazi actions in Canada. The committee who wrote the policies [were concerned](#) with protecting freedom of expression in Canada, "emphasiz[ing] the high esteem that should be placed on free expression in Canada," but explained limitations were necessary when "liberty becomes license and colours the quality of liberty itself with an unacceptable stain."

The rise of anti-trans and homophobic rhetoric is an unacceptable stain on the liberty of LGBTQAI2S+ individuals and we are calling on UBC and other institutions to refuse the platforming of hate speech.