



Lifetime Censorship Award

by FIRE, February 13, 2024

Harvard is America’s worst college for free speech. Its recent attempt to silence The New York Post shows why.

Harvard University came in dead last on this year’s College Free Speech Rankings — achieving a worst-ever score. When asked about Harvard’s abysmal ranking during her congressional testimony in December, then-Harvard President Claudine Gay said she didn’t think the ranking was “an accurate representation” of Harvard’s respect for free speech. But all one needs to do to understand Harvard’s *disrespect* for free speech is look at its record of censorship.

Only a few weeks before Gay’s testimony, Harvard hired self-advertised “media assassins” to threaten the New York Post with a defamation lawsuit and “immense” damages if the paper published a story alleging Gay plagiarized some of her scholarship. So much for placing “a high priority on freedom of speech” — or freedom of the press for that matter. Gay resigned on Jan. 2, after more than 40 allegations of plagiarism came to light.

Long before Harvard threatened news outlets with litigation for their reporting, it punished faculty and students for their speech. School administrators drove out lecturer Carole Hooven for arguing that biological sex is real. It rescinded a fellowship for former Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth over his purported “anti-Israel bias.” It

effectively fired an economics professor for an op-ed he published in India. It canceled a professor's course on policing following student uproar. It fired professor Ronald Sullivan from his deanship after students protested his role on Harvey Weinstein's criminal defense team. It bizarrely demanded students take down a Nicki Minaj flag because the community could find it "offensive." And the list goes on.

Even outside speakers invited to campus aren't safe from Harvard's censorial glare. In 2022, feminist philosopher Devin Buckley was disinvited from an English department colloquium because of her views on sex and gender. Her talk was supposed to be on the separate topic of British romanticism.

Harvard students clearly feel the chill. Students report low administrative support for free speech and low comfort expressing ideas, placing the school near the bottom of FIRE's College Free Speech Rankings in both individual categories. Unfortunately, Harvard students themselves may also contribute to the problem. If the efforts to oust Sullivan and cancel the policing class aren't evidence enough, an alarming 30% of Harvard students think using violence to stop a campus speech is acceptable in at least some circumstances.

For its long track record of censorship, Harvard is receiving FIRE's Lifetime Censorship Award. It joins Georgetown University, Yale University, Syracuse University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and DePaul University in receiving this "honor." It's past time Harvard truly commits to its ostensible truth-seeking mission and the principles of free speech and academic freedom that make it possible. But that may be wishful thinking, the triumph of hope over experience.