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Free speech

Although the interaction of students with controversial topics is crucial for inculcating new ideas and critical thinking but narrowing topics is equally important for ensuring dignity and safety. Universities may allow controversial debaters to speak but impose rules for preventing adverse events. As the purpose of higher education is to promote critical thinking in students that will require universities to provide opportunities for facing and evaluating ideas. According to this ideology, universities must allow controversial speakers to speak when they agree to follow the rules. The purpose would be to encourage rational dialogue and inculcation of new ideas. This will be an appropriate strategy for restricting speakers for making hatred or discriminatory comments.

The speeches that can promote violence or hatred and lacks a university's mission must be prevented. The purpose of educational institutes is to encourage studies and constructivism, but any activity of such nature can have negative impacts on the students. The legal scholar Alexander Meiklejohn claimed that "judgment will turn on how supporting or not supporting a given speaker, or a given policy of supporting student groups to invite speakers, fulfills the articulated mission of the university” (Robert). The universities must ensure that the speaker will only choose a topic that has relevance with educational policy or influence students in a positive way. This is because controversial topics allow students to broaden their thinking. Their interaction with new topics will give them opportunities of examining the content of the debate that will be beneficial for establishing critical approach. Controversial debates are useful to the extent that they encourage skepticism also they develop the ability to differentiate between right and wrong. Free speech is only useful to the extent that it promotes the ability of criticism and dialogue.

Debates that raises the probability of violence or hatred must be prevented. History reveals that “just letting someone like Murray be heard increases the likelihood of violence against minorities” (CBS). Charles Murray’s claims were not part of the university mission because he used discriminatory comments by suggesting, “race may play a part in determining intelligence, and asserted that blacks do less well than whites on IQ tests” (CBS). Allowing such controversial speakers to talk freely at colleges or universities will provoke negative emotions in listeners. Such debates will have two outcomes: first, it will promote disparity between black and white students second, it will incite emotions of rage and hatred among black students. The findings of Murray set off a firestorm in 1994 because he agitated the students who responded negatively. Speakers like Murray fail to accept their wrong choice of topics instead contribute to blaming their inability to engage with controversial ideas. The possible solution for preventing such incidents is by narrowing the topics of discussion and imposing rules.

The idea of imposing restrictions on free speech at universities can also be justified by considering the mission of universities. The purpose of their existence is to provide a healthy learning environment to the students while derogatory or hateful debates promotes hostility. Universities cannot ensure protection to students in hostile environments. Setting rules are valid because it prevents the adversities from happening by eliminating opportunities. Derogatory comments are capable of causing “the potential trauma or the potential violence this could bring to marginalized students” (CBS). It is thus inappropriate to allow any kind of debate in universities or colleges. Universities must promote the concept of respect for students, so any hateful or discriminatory comment that causes humiliation is wrong. Disrespecting certain marginalized groups undermines the university mission of equal educational opportunities. The institutes must provide productive learning environments that permit all students to progress irrespective of their gender, race or ethnicities. This depicts that any debate that targets any specific group must be banned for guaranteeing students safety and dignity.

The purpose of first-amendment is to guarantee democracy by protecting political life. The argument states that free speech was established to criticize the politicians or the state, but today people are using it for targeting ordinary people. This is against the constitutional philosophy. Robert claims that "First Amendment rights were developed and defined to protect the political life of the nation. But life within universities is not a mirror of that life" (Robert). This reveals that one must not mix politics with education. Universities must be free from politics because they are serving the purpose of educating students. Another view reflects that students in universities have a right to academic freedom that is against the free speech concept used by the controversial speakers. They must be concerned about freedom of research and freedom of teaching not on sharing political thoughts. The situations have become more alarming due to the outside speakers who engage students in non-academic discussions. Speeches at universities must be different from the ones delivered outside.

The counter-argument claims that imposing restrictions is against the ideology of free speech. First-amendment gives everyone the right to say anything and at anyplace. “Speech promoting hatred or at least, speech perceived as promoting hatred may be abhorrent, but it is nonetheless constitutionally protected” (Rampell). It is thus a violation of the first-amendment to punish or expel students for making free speech or comments. The argument states that state or university cannot restrict speakers from saying anything. They have every right to share their views, irrespective of the nature of the content. There is a need for understanding the real meaning of First-Amendment that does not constrain anyone from speaking. The debate that free speech must narrow window for permissible topics is invalid. This is against the notions of free speech because the purpose of this amendment was to criticize and share one's concerns about any event. The purpose of such restrictions is to discourage freedom by protecting political agendas.

Constitution protects every speech including hate or discriminatory speech. The counter-argument to strict rules claims that banning universities to provide a platform for political debate is the violation of first-amendment. The central idea of free speech was to give the power of criticizing politicians or state to the public. Now by setting rules for controversial speakers at educational institutes will deprive them of that power. Rules or narrowing of topics means that one is not free to share the ideas or thoughts. The role of state and universities to impose rules on controversial speakers is unconstitutional. It indicates that they don’t understand the practical meaning of free speech.

The central argument claims that universities must impose restrictions on the outside speakers for ensuring that they engage students in a debate that promote critical thinking. It is appropriate to restrict speakers from making derogatory or hateful comments. The argument states that universities must welcome outside speakers only when they address the university mission because the purpose of its existence is to provide learning opportunities to the students. The counter-argument is invalid because it ignores the difference between academic freedom and free speech. The purpose of first-amendment was to give the right to criticize the politicians. Without rules, speakers will be free to engage students in discriminatory discussions that will promote the feelings of hatred and violence. It is this justified for the university to set rules that will eliminate the possibilities of derogatory comments.

Work Cited

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