

A Statement from the WWU Special Snowflakes

We are a group of students who interrupted the Jonathan Zimmerman event which took place last Friday at Western. The event was hosted by 10 different departments, offices, and programs, including the President's Office, the Associated Students, and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. At the beginning of the event, we stood up for about 15 minutes and shared our concerns about the speaker. Zimmerman was left with an hour and a half to speak. You can watch our speech and read our statement here. _____

On Monday, three of us received emails from the Office of Student Life notifying us that we may have violated WWU's Student Conduct Code and are required to attend a meeting about the "student conduct process". The emails state that the purpose of the student conduct system is "to ensure that students act in a manner consistent with high standards of scholarship and behavior, and to maintain the safety and well-being of all members of the university community".

The irony of this situation is clear. Not only is the administration criminalizing students for exercising our rights to peacefully organize, gather, and voice our opinions at an event that focused on the topic of free speech, but we are also being accused of jeopardizing the safety of the WWU community as a result of speaking up against hate speech on our campus. Zimmerman himself shook our hands as we exited the space; clearly, he did not feel unsafe as a result of our statement. To assert that our action in any way posed a threat to the wellbeing of the WWU community is quite a stretch.

In addition, The Office of Student Life has repeatedly been criticized by members of the WWU community for their failure to adequately address the issue of sexual violence on our campus. This office took less than one business day to respond to our action yet has repeatedly failed to respond to sexual violence. We ask that The Office of Student Life revisit the purpose of the student conduct system and consider whether their actions reflect their commitment to "maintain the safety and well-being of all members of the university community".

Chapter 516-21 of the Student Conduct Code defines disruptive behavior as "any behavior which substantially disrupts, disturbs, or interferes with" educational events, official university activities, traffic, or the protection of university property. Determining what counts as "substantial" disruptions is a highly subjective endeavor. Given that we did not prevent Zimmerman from speaking and instead only slightly delayed his talk, we are unconvinced that our actions violated the student conduct code. In the emails we received we were also cited as disrupting "the ability of students to learn", which is counterintuitive given that our aim was to encourage students to think more critically about what they were being told. It seems that WWU only protects students' rights to learn if what they are learning aligns with the ideas and interests of the administration. We are here at college to not only further our learning, but to be critical about what we are taught. Critical thinking includes challenging what we are being taught when necessary.

As we said in our statement at the event, students have a right and a duty to interrupt oppression and speak up against hatred. WWU's mission statement claims that we are a "student centered" university, and we agree - ALL students should feel safe and supported on our campus, which is why we feel that transphobes, white supremacists, and their allies are not welcome in our community. How can students of color, transgender students, and students of marginalized genders feel supported at this university when WWU chooses to give financial support and a platform to a speaker like Zimmerman while at the same time underfunding programs like Justice Speaks?

We are also deeply concerned about the implications of the administration targeting student organizers for interrupting this event in particular. The most vocal opponent to our action was an older white man who wore a "Make America Great Again" hat. You can hear his comments throughout the live stream video as he heckles and shouts at us - at one point he shouts, "Hate speech IS free speech!" The Trump supporter is a good illustration of the types of people who feel empowered by Zimmerman's narrative. Zimmerman's presence at WWU could serve as a stepping stone to allowing people like Milo Yiannopoulos or Heather MacDonald onto our campus. Furthermore, Zimmerman's narrative

could empower faculty and administration to push back against student movements. Trivializing microaggressions and asserting that students are too coddled are ideas which will hurt marginalized students the most. This event furthers the narrative that students who speak up about harmful language or problematic curriculum are being overly sensitive.

We, students of WWU, must exercise vigilance and pay close attention to the changes happening on our campus which may lead to increased obstacles for students who try to organize and resist the status quo. Our situation does not operate in a vacuum, and is part of a larger trend of the WWU administration limiting students' rights to free speech and self expression. One example of this is the recently updated Residential Community Standards, which state that "No sign or display of any kind shall be displayed to the public view on or from any room, suite, or other residential living space. Limited exceptions exist for signs or displays supporting events sponsored by the hall council, resident advisers or approved by the resident director". Policies like this one continue to narrow the first amendment rights of students.

We'd like to close by pointing out the timing of these emails. Considering that WWU claims to value student success, it is frustrating that we have had to spend so much time responding to this event during dead week. As the quarter comes to a close, we are all swamped with essays, projects, and exams, yet have had to spend hours organizing in response to this situation. Student activists and organizers consistently have to take time away from their studies to put work into making sure that our campus meets the basic needs of students. Actions like this taken by the university contribute to the higher dropout rates of students of color, queer students, students with disabilities, and students of marginalized genders. We hope that students, staff, faculty, and the broader campus community will continue to stand up against hatred, bigotry, and oppression of our rights. Please join us in protecting students' rights by making two quick phone calls using the script below.

In solidarity,

The WWU Special Snowflakes.

CALL TO ACTION: Please support the rights of students to organize against hatred. Cali Assistant Dean of Students Michael Sledge at (360) 650-2484 AND President Sabah Randhawa at (360)-650-348Q and read the following*:

"Hello Mr. _____, my name is _____ and I am a [WWU student/ WWU alumni/ WWU professor/ Bham community member/ etc]. I am calling to ask that you drop the complaints filed against the three WWU students who interrupted the Jonathan Zimmerman event last Friday. Students have a right to speak up against hatred and bigotry and it is a violation of the first amendment to punish students for sharing their thoughts on the event. I am asking that you drop the complaints immediately and also make a commitment to support the rights of student activists in the future. Thank you so much!"

**Feel free to craft your own message; Just please be sure to include the ask that they drop the complaints against the three students who interrupted the Zimmerman event and that you have a respectful but firm tone.*