

Free speech, free press, and a free society are all things that I've grown accustomed to. They've never been challenged, and I thank our Constitution for guaranteeing these liberties as rights.

However, as I move onto college, I've researched how free speech changes when on college campuses. There's been evidence on both sides whether or not public colleges and universities in the U.S. ought to restrict constitutionally protected speech. I show more support for a restriction on campuses while still supporting no restrictions off campus.

Hate crimes currently infiltrate our media as we see people act hatefully and aggressively based on stereotypes and prejudice. While I do feel uneasy that hate speech is constitutionally protected, I believe that is the cornerstone to maintaining a free society. Speech is speech including the hurtful ways that words can be used. In *R.A.V. v. City of St. Paul* (1992), the Supreme Court ruled that any selective prohibition of speech in regard to hate speech is unconstitutional as well that the act of burning a cross on private property is a misdemeanor. The ruling is twofold: one in speech and one in actions. I think the way hate crime acts are set up to punish actions but not words themselves is a good form of deterrence for hate acts.

In public spaces I do believe that instead of having governmental restrictions on speech, people should look to combating speech with more speech. School has taught me that communication does more than censorship. I do believe that college campuses should encourage speech with speech codes to promote more critical discussion e.g. while in a classroom so everyone feels safe to participate. This can be done in an education-based platform for learning where hate speech is restricted. Hate speech isn't part of critical discussion and learning- it is attacking someone for who they are. I think a light barrier on speech restrictions is best to make students feel safe while

learning but at the same time, also prepare them before they go into the real world- a world without any restrictions.

In the end, I believe that Pennsylvania Judge Mark Martin sums up my opinion on the use of free speech, “our forefathers intended to use the First Amendment so we can speak with our mind, not to piss off other people and cultures.” Restrictions in classrooms serve to protect identity while still maintaining class discussion. Discussions remain important in today’s world to create tolerance and broaden perspectives which is what higher education is for.

— Elizabeth Peterson, *West High School*