



Top Three Lefty Unis

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From the sandstones to the concrete monstrosities, Australia's university students are returning to lecture halls and classrooms in coming weeks. This provides an opportune time to ask: are our publically funded universities adequately guarding freedom of expression? Are our universities allowing the voicing of competing perspectives in the pursuit of knowledge and truth?

The Institute of Public Affairs' Free Speech on Campus Audit 2017 found, from analysis of over 165 policies and actions, mounting evidence of censorship. Thirty-four of Australia's 42 universities are hostile to free speech, seven threaten free speech, and just one, the University of New England, supports free speech on campus. From violent protests against speakers, to university policies that prevent hurt 'feelings', the atmosphere on campus is often not friendly to freedom.

Some universities are standouts – and not in a good way. As found by the *Free Speech on Campus Audit*, here are, in reverse order, Australia's 'top' three worst campuses for free speech:

3. James Cook University

James Cook University's treatment of Professor Peter Ridd is, quite frankly, embarrassing. The hounding of a professor for discussing science belongs more to the time of Galileo than to modern Australia. Last year, Ridd appeared on Sky News with Alan Jones to talk about the IPA's book, *Climate Change: The Facts 2017*. 'The science is coming out not properly checked, tested or replicated and this is a great shame because we really need to be able to trust our scientific institutions and the fact is I do not think we can any more,' Ridd said in relation to science about the Great Barrier Reef.

For these comments Ridd was given a 'Final Censure' and gag order that would prevent him from making these sorts of comments in future. Ridd refused to accept them and is now fighting James Cook in the courts. Ridd's experience sends a signal to fellow students and academics alike to not express a view outside of the university-approved groupthink.

The treatment of Ridd is just one part of the story. In the past, James Cook University ousted climate sceptic Bob Carter from his adjunct professorship. In another case, students were expelled from a residential college because they made jokes about religion during a music competition. James Cook University has also recently introduced a policy that prevents speech that 'makes a person feel offended.' Hearing an idea that is the opposite of your own can often feel offensive – meaning this policy in effect curtails the ability for students and academics to explore controversial ideas.

2. Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University maintains more policies that threaten freedom of expression than any other university in Australia. The university has a 1,600 word policy on when, where and how flags should be flown, however it does not have a policy dedicated to free intellectual inquiry on campus.

The university does have a policy that prevents 'offensive language,' and, extraordinarily, 'sarcasm'. This threatens genuine debate and discussion in class if, in the subjective view of the accuser, a comment was offensive or sarcastic.

The university's 'Anti-Racism Policy,' a laudable goal, is seething with ideology. The policy claims racism is 'best understood when acknowledging the context of power, oppression and privilege'. This is an explicit identity politics definition of racism which is heavily contested, rejecting the traditional definition of racism: the harbouring of specific racist beliefs. The policy also requires that curriculum design be 'culturally inclusive', preventing the at times necessary criticism of culture.

Charles Sturt University is introducing a new requirement for 'Indigenous Australian Content in Courses' by 2020. This means all students, whether they are studying cybercrime, creative arts, or law will be taught topics like 'The Dreaming as worldview and law'. This content, which must be centrally approved, re-purposes the university from a place about exploring ideas, to teaching



narrow topics in every course in an uncritical manner.

The university also tells students that they are 'expected to value' political causes such as 'social justice including ethical practice and global citizenship' and 'economic, social and environmental sustainability, including the responsible stewardship of resources'. I dare not imagine the response to expressing a non-leftist view in class.

1. University of Sydney

Between the actions of staff, students and administrators, there has been more silencing of speech at the University of Sydney than any other university in the country. The University of Sydney was found to be the most hostile university to free speech in the *IPA's Free Speech on Campus Audit 2017*.

In the past, the student union has attempted to ban student clubs including a men's mental health society, the Brotherhood Recreation and Outreach, and threatened to deregister Christian clubs, speakers have been violently protested and in other cases banned from campus, academics have been sacked, and the university almost refused to host the Dalai Lama to avoid damaging ties with China.

In just the past year, the student union attempted to block the screening of the controversial *Red Pill* film because, it was claimed, that showing a video could 'physically threaten women on campus'. The university has charged security fees to conservative students which are not charged for the activities of other student groups. Meanwhile, a protest against No campaigners in the same-sex marriage plebiscite turned violent, requiring police attendance. The University of Sydney has also refused to provide students with a venue to host Australian Christian Lobby head Lyle Shelton. In another case, a student was told he could not link anti-Israel sentiment to anti-Semitism in class. The university administrators have also succumbed to demands for censorship, apologising after complaints were made by Chinese international students about a map in a lecture which showed disputed territory inside India rather than China.

The protection of free expression speaks to the very essence of a university, whose role in society, to increase knowledge and discover truth, requires the ability to freely debate ideas. Australia's universities are often failing in this task. Let's hope they can do better in 2018.

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