



Two Ideas Of A University – Speech By Matthew Lesh

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*Speech by Matthew Lesh, Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs, to the University Chancellors Council's Conference on University Governance, Adelaide, Australia, 4 October 2018*

Thank you very much for the invitation to address this august gathering. In particular, I pay my tribute to Peter Shergold who graciously organised this session in the spirit of free speech and viewpoint diversity.

Let me start by telling you about Amelia and Steve.

Amelia, an academic at an Australian university, reached out to me earlier this year after seeing my work on free speech. She didn't tell me anything in text but asked for a call. I could hear the passion yet the fear in her voice. Amelia is of the political left, has voted Labor all her life, but is now in touch with someone from a free market think tank about free speech.

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Amelia's ordeal began when she was asked to take down articles from her office door because they were, allegedly, making others feel unsafe. The articles were general medical science articles, not some extreme viewpoint. Nevertheless, Amelia was interrogated and reprimanded at a meeting with the head of her faculty. Reflecting on the experience, Amelia says she felt 'gaslighted' – that's when you're told to believe one thing but your observation of reality is the opposite. "I was told that academic freedom exists and then I was told to take down these research articles," Amelia tells me.

Steve is a student at an Australian university who I met a few months ago. He tells me about a lecturer who relentlessly makes fun of Donald Trump and instructs students to voice their outrage on Twitter. The lecturer tells students they are doing the wrong thing if they are not pursuing social justice causes.

Steve tells me about a student in his class that presented an assignment on male domestic violence. During the presentation the student was interrupted and berated by the lecturer simply for expressing a contrary perspective – and told that male domestic violence is not an issue worth talking about and because it was a right wing perspective he would get lower grades. The student making this presentation didn't even realise what he was doing, he isn't a political guy, he was just trying to present a different angle on the topic.

Steve, the student I met, says that he pretended to be a 'satirical feminist,' which led to good grades. After seeing what happens to those that express a contrary position Steve says he's too scared to express his views on political issues in class.

To read the full speech, [click here](#).