

Minutes of the Open Forum Held by the USG Senate on Sunday, April 26, 2015

Regarding the Freedom of Expression Statement Adopted by the Faculty on Monday, April 6, 2015

The Senate held an open forum on Sunday, April 26, 2015 in Frist Multipurpose Room B regarding the Freedom of Expression Statement¹ (“Faculty Statement”) adopted by the faculty on Monday, April 6, 2015. The open forum was called to order at 6:35 p.m., the Vice President (Aleksandra Czulak ’17) being in the chair and the U-Council Chair (Zhan Okuda-Lim ’15) being present as acting secretary.

The Vice President established the following ground rules for the open forum:

- Prof. Klainerman has up to 10 minutes for an opening statement.
- Thereafter, each member of the public and Senate may speak for up to 2 minutes.
- Those who have not yet spoken will have preference to speak over those who have already spoken.

Deborah Prentice, Dean of the Faculty; Sergiu Klainerman, Professor, Mathematics; and Ramona Romero, General Counsel; introduced themselves. Dean Prentice explained the role of the Dean of the Faculty, including the role of her office in maintaining the *Rules and Procedures of the Faculty of Princeton University and Other Provisions of Concern to the Faculty*.

Prof. Klainerman explained his rationale. His main motivation was in reaction to general events across American universities, not specifically to recent events at Princeton University. He cited articles from major newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*, in which writers have expressed concern about eroding academic freedom on university campuses. In addition, he cited an op-ed in the *New York Times* regarding the creation of safe spaces and the calls for trigger warnings. He mentioned that two colleagues from Russia remarked that in light of recent campus calls for “sensitivity training” and reporting of biased remarks by faculty, these colleagues asked whether these changes were taking place in the “Soviet Union.”

Prof. Klainerman explained that in his letter to Christopher Eisgruber ’83, University President, he wrote that personal safety and human emotions are often in a state of permanent conflict. Personal safety often takes precedence, but authoritarian regimes often use safety as an excuse to establish control. He recounted his early years under the Communist regime in Romania, in which exploitation and inequality were rampant and in which justice was lacking because of the authoritarian nature of the regime.

Prof. Klainerman said that there is a cacophony of voices on campus that demonize voices with which they disagree. He expressed his worry that these students themselves can become agents of intolerance and hate. He wrote that free speech requires discipline and knowledge to deal with offensive speech, or simply ignoring it if one thinks it is unworthy of a reply. He expressed that these are good skills for students to have for later life.

Prof. Klainerman cited a recent editorial in the *Daily Princetonian* in which the Editorial Board expressed that different sides in many issues will face offensive remarks in open conversation.

¹ To read the full Statement, see <http://www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S42/84/36147/index.xml?section=topstories>

The Board had explained its view that the University should not take sides in determining which speech is permissible, and that the University should support the marketplace of ideas and respectful argumentation among students and other members of the University community.

Prof. Klainerman expressed that students must accept that not all conversation will be comfortable to hear. He expressed his belief that upholding free speech will only be a net gain for the University.

The Vice President reiterated the ground rules.

A student asked if the names of faculty supporters on the petition for the Faculty Statement will be publicly available.

Dean Prentice explained that the names are not secret and that the names would be made publicly available by the end of the week, perhaps online.

A student asked if the vote was done by voice vote.

Dean Prentice explained that it was by voice vote, but it was not unanimous. Nevertheless, the vote was overwhelmingly in favor.

The student asked the President (Ella Cheng '16) about the purpose of the open forum. The President explained that the open forum was to allow students to ask any question about the Faculty Statement and to express their views about it.

Dan Mozley '17, U-Councilor, expressed that Prof. Klainerman's written remarks that he read at the open forum should also be made publicly available.

A student asked if Prof. Klainerman sees a difference between academic freedom for faculty and such freedom for students. The student also asked about the factor of academic integrity in terms of the "truth" of statements expressed freely.

Prof. Klainerman responded that he believes academic freedom applies to everyone. He also expressed that there is an expectation that statements expressed by faculty members are expected to be in high integrity, and that if statements made by faculty members may be factually unsound, that should be challenged.

A student expressed his thought that it is an exaggeration to say that academic freedom is being challenged at university campuses. He said that if students hear something that they find offensive, students should be able to respond and say that such statements are offensive. He asked Prof. Klainerman if the Professor feels that this is acceptable. He also asked about whether Prof. Klainerman would find sensitivity training acceptable.

Prof. Klainerman said that having lived under a Communist regime, he is wary of programs that seem like reeducation.

Ms. Romero said that there is an expectation that there be civility in discourse on campus.

A student asked about how to define the term “civility.”

Ms. Romero expressed that one knows it when one sees it. In terms of the line that one must cross before speech is restricted, the Faculty Statement proscribes certain things such as defamation or harassment.

Dean Prentice expressed that not all faculty members who signed the petition necessarily signed it for the same reasons as Prof. Klainerman. She said that there are many reasons why different individuals had signed the petition.

A student expressed his view that this open forum is a positive first step, but that a lot needs to be done to continue open discussion with all parties involved and those who hold different viewpoints on the Faculty Statement. He said that the faculty as a whole needs to do more to inform students on their actions.

Ms. Romero expressed that if students feel that others are saying or doing things that are inappropriate that create discomfort that amounts to abuse or harassment, they should report the issues by the appropriate avenues. Discomfort is one thing; actions and behaviors that threaten and demean particular individuals are serious and need to be addressed.

Hunter Dong '17, Treasurer, expressed that the Faculty Statement puts the University in a reactionary position. He asked Prof. Klainerman if the University should take preventative measures to stop hate speech because the Faculty Statement sounds like it could condone hate speech.

Ms. Romero expressed that the Faculty Statement does not condone hate speech and that was never the intent. The Faculty Statement is based on the University's existing core values on academic freedom and listening to different viewpoints.

Lavinia Liang '18, Chief Designer, asked what role the administration would have in facilitating a relationship between faculty and the students.

Dean Prentice said that the administration has an important role to play in terms of creating conditions to prevent hate speech to begin with.

Zhan Okuda-Lim '15, U-Council Chair, asked about an ACLU statement that was against speech codes, but called on University administrators and faculty to speak out more against bigoted speech and work on curriculum changes to address campus climate and culture.

Prof. Klainerman referenced a neo-Nazi march through a Jewish neighborhood (in Skokie, Illinois) in the 1970s; he said that the march happened and people moved on with their lives.

A student said that it is disingenuous to say that absolutely all speech is necessary to academic freedom. Also, ignoring marginalizing speech is only upholding the status quo. Those not target-

ed by hate speech do not need to respond, while those targeted bear the cost by needing to engage in counter speech. Counter speech becomes tiring and places the burden on marginalized individuals to engage in counter speech. At the same time, those who say hateful speech do not face such burden. Furthermore, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution applies to government action, not the actions of private institutions.

Ms. Romero expressed that while the First Amendment does apply to public institutions, there is more nuance. She hopes that if individuals who are targeted with hate speech respond with counter speech, others (who are not targeted with hate speech) would also join these individuals in support.

Rohan Patlolla '18, Class of 2018 Senator, expressed that in the United States, Jewish individuals are not as marginalized as African American individuals are. He mentioned posts on Yik Yak that caused African American students to feel unsafe. He expressed his concern that people will not feel empowered to respond if they feel threatened.

Prof. Klainerman said that many individuals in the neighborhood through which a neo-Nazi group marched were Holocaust survivors. He said that racial issues need to be addressed in a civilized manner, but not all words and statements are racist. We should speak out against racism on campus if it happens, but he “hopes racism doesn’t happen.” Students responded that acts of racism do happen.

A student expressed that a panelist at a recent panel (Dr. Russell Nieli *70, Lecturer, Politics) had implied that students of color do not bring value to campus; this student said that such viewpoints are deeply offensive. The student expressed that the timing of the Faculty Statement in relation to recent events was bad.

A student spoke about cultural competency courses. Crossing the line is highly subjective. When does “distasteful” become “demeaning”? There are faculty members at Princeton who study these issues. The student said that he did not understand why faculty and administrators would oppose a way of understanding marginalization. The University should be proactive; actions taken so far have been reactive.

Dean Prentice agreed that cultural competency training is useful, but should not be mandatory. While those who may most need to take it may not take it, the research suggests that mandatory training does not “enlighten” many. An important first step is to make such training available. But it is important to create a community in which understanding others is more salient so that more people are willing to take such training.

Ms. Romero expressed her thanks to students and said that the remedy to troubling speech is more speech. Individuals have the right to respond to hateful speech. In recounting the panel, she noted that two panelists (Cecilia Rouse, Dean, Woodrow Wilson School; and President Eisgruber) vehemently disagreed with Dr. Nieli. Students will be exposed to ideas they do not want to hear.

A student stated that there are psychological studies showing that teachers can be biased against students of color; a professor may give students of color lower grades. She said that “implicit bias is very real” and that such bias transcends speech and individual acts.

Paul Draper '18, Class of 2018 Senator, asked if there is a system to address material consequences of implicit bias.

Ms. Romero expressed that if there is a specific bias issue, remedies include the University Ombuds office (Wokie Nwabueze, Ombuds Officer), lodging a complaint against the faculty member with the University Title IX Coordinator (Michele Minter, Vice Provost for Institutional Equity and Diversity), and other means.

A student expressed that the University cannot enforce every person’s opinion, but can address specific issues. The student said that he has never experienced racism and never will. But on issues of discrimination, he said that he and other students who hold conservative viewpoints have been ridiculed, but has been able to express his views. He said that Princeton students should appreciate academic freedom at Princeton.

A student expressed concern that when a student faces bias from a faculty member, the burden is on the student to leave the course or respond.

Dean Prentice responded that a student does not need to take classes from faculty who harbor negative views about the student or the student’s background.

The student again expressed concern that the burden is on the student.

Dean Prentice expressed that Dr. Nieli, while in the panel discussion, did not explicitly say that students of color do not belong on campus, but insinuated it. In rehiring him, the Politics Department evaluated all information about Dr. Nieli. No student evaluations expressed concern that he was unjust. Dean Prentice said she understood why some students would never want to take a precept with Dr. Nieli, but there was no evidence suggesting he had been unfair to students who had taken a precept with him.

The President thanked members of the public, Prof. Klainerman, Dean Prentice, and Ms. Romero for attending the open forum.

The open forum adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Zhan Okuda-Lim '15
U-Council Chair and U-Councilor
Acting Secretary