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SPEECH FIRST

Speech First Files Formal Complaint Against UNC Chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine

Chapel Hill, NC. (January 31, 2024) – Today, Speech First filed a [formal complaint](#) with Jonathan Sauls, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Success and Administration, regarding violations of state law and University policy by the UNC chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine.

On June 19, 2023, the UNC College of Arts and Sciences Program for Public Discourse invited Duke University professor Frank Bruni and journalist Bari Weiss to speak on campus as part of its Abbey Speaker Series. The event, scheduled for the evening of January 22nd, 2024, was intended to foster “a discussion of objectivity in journalism.” On January 16, 2024, UNC’s SJP chapter announced plans to disrupt the event through a “walkout.” The “walkout” was nothing less than an all-out attempt at a heckler’s veto. Twenty-five minutes into the event, a large number of students flooded the aisles of the auditorium, chanting and shouting down the speakers. The event was brought to a standstill for several minutes until the students—who were warned that they were violating the Campus Free Speech Act—were removed from the room by campus security.

This is just a sampling of the ongoing issues at UNC-Chapel Hill, UNC has failed to foster a campus conducive for free expression. UNC has a [bias response team](#) in place, which means students can anonymously report on one another for essentially anything they deem offensive. They have a [harassment policy](#) in place that is so vague and overbroad that it unconstitutionally suppresses students’ speech. When UNC’s Board of Trustees made the decision to create a non-partisan School of Civic Engagement so as to expose students to the basic principles that make up our governmental and legal systems, nearly [700 UNC faculty members](#) signed onto a letter *condemning* the board’s intentions. Regarding difference of opinion, a routinely offered course within the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Department of Communication labeled [“Hate Speech”](#), solely focuses on right-wing thought. And to top it all off back in [October of 2022](#), another speaking engagement was shouted down by activists in violation of campus policy and state law—followed by, what appears to be, no disciplinary actions taken by the university . This is all indicative of a larger problem happening at UNC.

[Cherise Trump](#), Executive Director of Speech First, issued the following statement:

“The right to free speech does not mean the right to silence others. What good are campus policies and state laws protecting free speech if there is no intention of enforcing them? Regardless of whether you’re a student, administrator, or professor, accountability should not be some distant boogeyman that never materializes. Speech First is not going to sit idly by and let free speech be squashed at universities

across this nation. The regularity with which shouting down conservative, or even moderate speakers occurs on campuses is causing a decline in student morale and intellectual stimulation. Furthermore, the normalization of speaker shout downs is evidence of a serious dereliction of the universities' responsibility to educate students on not only the law, but on the fundamental principles that undergird American society. What we are seeing on campuses today is evidence of a hypersensitivity to opposing ideas which has been stoked by politically interested campus administrators and a university system that has abandoned the tenets of reason, critical thought, and the dialectic."

To schedule an engagement with Speech First, please contact Michael Hensley at
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