

Carleton shouldn't turn away demonstrators

Letter to the Editor

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RE: Balance of Right Editorial, 21 October 2010.

Carleton University will deny space in the quad to disturbing, upsetting, or offensive demonstrations. Carleton will provide space for such demonstrations, just not in a location where people can't easily avoid them.

This policy is entirely contrary to what a university is all about. Carleton should not patrol demonstrations for either content or presentation.

President Runte's central mistake is to think of the Carleton campus as a place where different sorts of people cross paths as they pursue their various projects, as though the quad were a downtown city street. She should, instead, conceive of the campus as a place where a very particular, very special sort of community lives.

A university campus is, first of all, or at least it should be, a home for university people, for intellectuals. Policies at a university should be designed and implemented with that fact or ideal in mind. A campus is not a city street welcoming to all, but a place entirely at the service of university people. Any accommodation with the needs or desires of people who are not university people is a betrayal of the university.

Being a university person requires always being ready to have one's beliefs and values challenged. An intellectual always leaves her position open to attack, her values at risk. If she is wrong about something, she wants to know that she is, and so she invites anyone at all to show her where and how she is wrong.

For this reason, an intellectual, a university person, would never turn a demonstrator away from the quad, especially if that demonstrator intends to challenge beliefs and values she holds deeply.

Carleton's policy on demonstrations, then, makes Carleton less of a home to intellectuals, to university people, than it could be. And because it mollicoddles the students—people, that is, who are on campus because they aspire to be intellectuals—it undercuts the educative mission of the university.

Everyone who steps onto a university campus risks being disturbed or upset, or at least that is how it should be. Moreover, only those people keen to risk being disturbed or upset belong on a university campus. University people at Carleton should be outraged at how their president has treated them, by her contempt for their values.