

Suspending a student for uttering slurs

Letter to the Editor, Windsor *Star*, 15 December 2011

Mark Mercer
Chair, Department of Philosophy
Saint Mary's University
Halifax, NS B3H 3C3
(902) 420-5825
mark.mercer@smu.ca

By suspending student Natasha Burge for comments she posted on Facebook, administrators at Kennedy Collegiate have expressed disdain for the peaceful expression of opinion and emotion. They also failed in their roles as educators. Part of a school's mission is to prepare young people for citizenship in a free country; to discharge that mission, administrators and teachers need to show that the only proper way to respond to words is with other words. If administrators disapprove of what Ms Burge said or the way in which she said it, they should explain to her and to the students at Kennedy why they disapprove. Punishing a person for what she says is inconsistent with helping students to become people who are able to think and judge for themselves.