

## 262. The University of Waterloo should have picked up the security tab

2 May 2018

<http://professormarkmercer.ca/commentary/262%20The%20University%20of%20Waterloo%20should%20have%20picked%20up%20the%20security%20tab.pdf>

Halifax *Chronicle Herald*, 3 May 2018

Under the headline: Why should campus groups foot security costs for controversial public forums?

<http://thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/1567479-opinion-why-should-campus-groups-foot-security-costs-for-controversial-public-forums>

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It's appalling that \$28,500 worth of risk can come into being merely should a person decide to hold a public discussion. \$28,500 is the security fee the Laurier Society for Open Inquiry (LSOI) was told it would have to pay in order to explore "multiculturalism, borders, and identity in Canada" at a venue at the University of Waterloo.

The discussion was to feature Faith Goldy and Ricardo Duchesne. Ms Goldy is a social and political commentator thought by some to be friendly to white nationalism; Dr Duchesne is a University of New Brunswick professor critical of multiculturalism and worried by the decay of Western institutions and values.

That these are unpleasant people who hold repellent views (if that's what one thinks) might be reason to demonstrate against them or to speak ill of those who want to offer them a platform. Enlightened people, of course, would want simply to criticize their ideas and arguments.

Only thugs, on the other hand, would harass a speaker or audience or cause damage or try to shut the event down. Even in calm and peaceful Canada, then, at least according to the experts who set the fee, there are such thugs and they need to be dealt with.

The discussion was scheduled for Monday 30 April. Unable to pay the security fee, the LSOI cancelled the event and refunded those who had bought tickets.

But should the LSOI have been charged a security fee at all?

I'm not asking whether in fact there was \$28,500 worth of risk out there. Now, I do accept that likely enough, even at universities, phony security fees have been used to deny venues to certain groups. But I am not saying or suggesting that that's the case here.

I am asking instead who should have paid the legitimately high security fee that the LSOI was quoted.

If the LSOI had been an official University of Waterloo group, then the University of Waterloo should have paid the security fee so as to enable the event to proceed. Universities should absorb the costs of security for university events, just as they absorb the costs of heating and cooling, electricity, and white-board markers.

Security costs at a university are, or should be, just part of the overhead.

If universities do not absorb security costs for university events, then those events will not occur. Without university functions, a university ceases to exist. That's why security should come from the general budget and not be charged to the university group putting on the event.

An objection to this argument is that not everything organized even by a recognized university group should count as a university event. Only those campus events that a vetting authority designates as university events should (and must) have their security costs covered. The vetting authority will ensure that only academically sound events receive the university's imprimatur. The university will thereby honour its responsibility to promote and protect valuable exchanges of ideas while both ensuring quality and saving money.

Besides being ripe for manipulation and corruption, such a system would destroy intellectual community at a university as well as dull the cutting edge of research. Nothing could be worse for the exchange of ideas than the need first to submit them to an authority for approval. And community would suffer as soon as the first professor or student is denied backing. Much better, then, for the administration to concern itself only with the fair distribution of resources.

In the case at hand, though, the University of Waterloo is not shirking its obligation to absorb the security costs of one of its groups, for the LSOI is an off-campus group. It's not an official society at any university.

Nonetheless, likely it was in Waterloo's long-term best interests to pick up the security tab rather than let the discussion be cancelled. After all, the thugs whose threats resulted in the cancellation got their way. Ticket holders are disappointed and intellectual life in Kitchener Waterloo is that much poorer. The University of Waterloo would have been performing a public service by helping the event to proceed.

Even more, the thugs will be emboldened by their success. They will try to make it hard for official university groups to hold the events they want. Since Waterloo didn't pay now, they will have to pay later, and have to pay more. Or, when the thugs eventually hit at home, Waterloo can shirk its duty to promote and protect the activities of university groups, and thereby deplete its atmosphere of the intellectual oxygen universities need.

These arguments show that Waterloo would have been prudent to absorb the LSOI's security costs, not that they were obligated to. Does this mean that in the end, the LSOI was merely the victim of thuggish behaviour, but not also of unfairness on the part of our respected institutions?

I don't think so. In the end, we, our community and society as a whole, should have covered the costs. After all, the LSOI is entitled to good policing, as are we all. The police are to ensure safety and order generally; they should, then, have stepped up to do their job for the LSOI.

If my walking downtown causes hooligans to harass people or damage property, it's not my fault and I shouldn't have to stay at home or hire security to stop them. I've already hired, through my taxes, the police. If the LSOI wants to hold a perfectly legal public discussion, and thugs want to disrupt it, then protecting the event is a matter for the police.

The LSOI may still need to pay for some forms of security—to discourage ticket scoffing, for one, and to keep the lines moving safely, for another. But these are security costs internal to the holding of the event. Preventing vandalism and mayhem, on the other hand, and prosecuting the vandals and the disruptive, are not properly the responsibility of the ordinary

citizen. We have police so that we may live civilly—live civilly, for instance, by gathering in public to talk about things.

In Waterloo, the thugs threatened disruption. Where were the police?

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Response by Lauchlin MacDonald, 11 May 2018: <http://thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/1570070-counterpoint-universities-shouldn%E2%80%99t-pick-up-tab-for-forums-featuring-extremists>

My comments on Laughlin MacDonald's article:

1) "Mercer brushes over the details of the planned talk."

In my view, the details are indeed irrelevant to the matter at hand. The question is whether a society in which open discussion is valued would require the group sponsoring a talk to pay for security against disruption.

2) "Why not describe exactly who Goldy is, and then make a principled stand that, no matter her views, the university should be providing her a space to promote them?"

Describing who Goldy is would be a digression. And I thought my article did articulate a principled stand that no matter her views, if people want to hear them, they should be able to hear them.

3) "When you have one person calling for the violent, forcible removal of minorities from a country, and another person (who very may well be a member of one of those minorities) saying that's not OK, which one is the thug?"

I never said a person saying that's not OK is a thug. (On the contrary.) I used the term "thug" to characterize those who engage in thuggish behaviour. I had in mind only those who would try to disrupt the talk.

4) "Arguably, the reason why the cost of security for the event was so high was not because of threats from protesters..., but because white nationalist speakers attract white nationalist crowds, who are notoriously violent."

Fair enough. We shouldn't let thugs of any stripe shut down talks, disruptive counter-protesters no less than disruptive protesters.

5) "Aside from the fact that criticizing these ideas and arguments is precisely what protesters are doing at events like the cancelled Goldy talk, Mercer is implying that what Goldy and people like her are interested in is 'the exchange of ideas' and good faith debate."

Disruptive protesters might well be criticizing something, but they are also disruptive. We should all be free to pursue our (legal) projects free of willful disruption.

Nothing I said implies that Goldy or others are interested in the exchange of ideas and good faith debate. Our concern for ideas and debate requires that we be concerned that even propagandists and people in bad faith are free to speak. The rule that insincere and bad faith talks may be disrupted just isn't going to work.

6) "The 'disruption' he refers to is protesting and civil engagement."

No, again, protesting and civil engagement is not disruptive and people should be free to engage in it. (And the police should protect it, without charge.) The "disruption" I referred to is disruption.

7) "If asked to choose between white nationalists 'civilly' promoting ethnic cleansing or the 'thugs' outside voicing their opposition, I'll side with the thugs every time."

Voicing opposition is not thuggish. Siding with those non-disruptively voicing opposition is not siding with the thugs.

The choice at issue in my article is between open discussion and the heckler's veto. The author, Lauchlin MacDonald, has chosen the heckler's veto.