

# One Wisconsin Now: University of Wisconsin students blast Board of Regents policy threatening free speech on campus

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MADISON, Wis. — University of Wisconsin students and free speech advocates are organizing to fight back against new restrictions on speech being imposed system wide by the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. On a media call, hosted by One Wisconsin Institute, students from UW-Madison, UW-La Crosse and UW-Oshkosh expressed their concerns with the threat to their free speech rights and called on their fellow students to speak out and share their stories. One Wisconsin Institute will be collecting stories to ensure student voices are heard and for possible litigation.

Despite existing laws on the books allowing for disorderly conduct to be prosecuted and no incidents of right-wing speakers being prevented from delivering remarks on UW campuses, Assembly Bill 299 (AB 299), upon which the Regents proposal is based, threatens students with expulsion for exercising their First Amendment right to denounce hate speech on University of Wisconsin campuses.

According to drafting records obtained by One Wisconsin Now, the bill, and now policy, are based on recommendations produced by the Goldwater Institute, an Arizona-based think tank whose operations are underwritten by some of the largest

right-wing funders including the Bradley, Koch and Walton foundations.

The following are statements from participants in the media call:

“The idea that UW-Madison is some sort of liberal paradise where conservative students live in fear is a myth. We know from the 2016 Campus Climate Survey that just the opposite is true.

“Not only do more conservative students report feeling safe and respected than liberal students on campus, they’re also less likely than liberal students to be expected to represent their point of view in class, something that particularly impacts students of color who are consistently expected to represent their entire racial/ethnic group in class.

“As a student, it feels like the state legislature and the Board of Regents aren’t trying to protect my free speech rights at all, but instead shut down any speech that threatens their point of view.”

–Chet Agni, UW-Madison student

“Everyone on campus generally seems to have respect for allowing other voices to speak, even if we don’t agree with them. For us, this really seems that legislation that is looking for a problem, rather than preventing anything.

“Students at UW-L feel like this policy prohibits their speech rather than protects it.”

–Sarah Semrad, U-Lax Crosse student, Vice Chair of College Democrats of Wisconsin, UWL Student Association Senator.

“In addition to being involved in various groups and organizations on campus, I also represent UW Oshkosh as it’s elected representative to the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors.

“I am deeply concerned with this policy as it relates to students having the right to protest and speak out against other cornering things. As someone who was elected, it has always been my guiding principle that “the people” should always get to express their opinion and dissatisfaction.

“This policy is troubling and makes many fearful of being able to speak up on future controversial bills and events.”

–Aaron Wojciechowski, UW-Oshkosh student and Winnebago County Board Supervisor

“This is not about academic ‘sifting and winnowing’ or protecting speech, this is about the Scott Walker-appointed Regents doing the bidding of partisan politicians and right-wing mega funders like the Bradley Foundation.

“An unconstitutional bill proposed by Republicans in the legislature is now an unconstitutional policy foisted on UW students by the Board of Regents. And we’re proud to stand with students in fighting back for free speech.”

-Analiese Eicher, Program Director One Wisconsin Institute