

A Statement on Events at Trent After the American Election

Debate is the lifeblood of democracy. In the wake of a controversial American election, this makes it not surprising that debate and its sibling, political protest, have dominated politics.

In the United States, before and after the election, university campuses have been one key locale for debate. Protests and confrontation have been less prominent in Canada, but there have been incidents of one sort or another at a number of Canadian universities – among them, Brock, McGill, Mount Royal and, yes, Trent’s Peterborough campus.

At Trent there have been some angry exchanges between those who support and those who oppose the results. There has been no violence (contrary to some reports), but there have been accusations and some exchanges have not been characterized by the civility that Trent expects.

The university welcomes a – peaceful – push by students who want to ensure that the campus is safe and secure for all, and free of discriminatory behaviour. It also welcomes the reminder that students and faculty have a right to – civilly – uphold and defend their political views. It is unfortunate that these laudable goals have been clouded by rumour which has been confused with reports of real incidents.

One sensational example is the rumour that a band of men in ski masks, waving confederate flags, chased a terrorized woman across the Faryon Bridge. Trent has 24 hour video surveillance of the Symons campus (with specific surveillance of the Faryon Bridge, a natural place for mischief) and it shows that this did not happen. Other rumours have invoked events which are not connected to the Trent campus.

This has disturbed the sense of security on the Peterborough campus. Trent investigates – and will continue to investigate – all reported incidents. Community members can report such events in confidence (to Security, to the Office of Human Rights, to Student Affairs, or through the Trent Central Student Association). Complaints against specific students or faculty are dealt with in a way that ensures a fair and impartial investigation.

In reality, there have been few incidents on the Trent campus. In total, three incidents have been reported. Two (one each on the two sides of the current confrontations) have been substantiated. Neither involves violence, but they do not conform to the university’s expectations of behaviour. Trent is not perfect but it continues to be a university which is characterized, not by such behaviour, but by acceptance and inclusion for individuals and groups, and for different points of view.

Trent’s core values will continue to be reflected in the university’s handling of these and similar incidents. One is a commitment to ensure the safety and security of all members of the Trent community. A second is a commitment to freedom of expression. A third is a commitment to ensure that faculty, students, staff and others are treated fairly.

Trent’s commitment to safety and security for all members of its community includes a commitment to human rights. The university does not tolerate discriminatory behaviour. It is especially determined to ensure that it provides a campus which displays a commitment to marginalized groups which include women, indigenous people, Muslims, and visible, sexual and Faith minorities.

As a university Trent welcomes debate between those who hold different views in the classroom and beyond. Freedom of expression does not include a right to slander, be abusive, defame or practice hate speech. But academic freedom for students and faculty does include the right to hold and champion unpopular views that others disagree with.

Within these bounds, Trent welcomes political debate and peaceful protest. As John Stuart Mill writes in *On Liberty*, the clash of opposing ideas is an essential element of good government. Like other universities, this is one of the contributions we make to democracy.

Leo Groarke
President
Trent University

A Note on Campus Resources:

All members of the Trent community are encouraged to report incidents of concern. In addition to the Office of Student Affairs, Centre for Human Rights, Equity, and Accessibility, and Security, a number of avenues and alternatives are listed here.

Trent International Program <http://www.trentu.ca/tip/>

First Peoples House of Learning <http://www.trentu.ca/fphl/>

Housing Services <http://trentu.ca/housing/>

Counselling Service <http://trentu.ca/counselling/>

Academic Advising <http://trentu.ca/advising/>

Trent Central Student Association <http://trentcentral.ca/>

Trent University Durham

Director of Student Affairs – justinfisher@trentu.ca

Counselling -- corinnphillips@trentu.ca

Academic Advising -- oshacademicadvisor@trentu.ca

Indigenous Cultural Counselling -- plezard@trentu.ca

A full printable list of resources is available at
<http://trentu.ca/studentaffairs/resources/overview.php>