

**POINT/COUNTERPOINT: DO SAFE SPACES BELONG ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES?**

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***POINT: SAFE SPACES CODDLE STUDENTS***

Whether or not to adopt safe spaces and to what extent has been a heated discussion on campus in the past year. I personally think that safe space rules would only spoil kids and make us more fragile.

If safe space rules are set up, that would mean we no longer tolerate speeches in class that can be somewhat sensitive or uncomfortable for some students to handle. I admit that the intention is good-natured, but I think this would be more harmful than beneficial.

Universities shouldn't be an ivory tower where students are kept innocent. It is true that we won't marginalize people if there is a safe space, but we will be marginalized after graduation if we are "trained" to feel uncomfortable when exposed to sensitive matters.

On the other hand, banning certain speeches strongly violates the First Amendment, which people hold a great esteem upon. The First Amendment guarantees our rights of free speech, and we shouldn't just give it away like that. If we let go of this and make one exception, we will never know what will be sacrificed next.

If you don't care about the fancy stuff, you should at least care about the quality of education. To consider safe spaces would make designing class topics quite difficult. Take philosophy or ethics class for example. Those kind of classes are likely to include popular topics such as euthanasia, gay rights or abortion. Those topics are frequently discussed because they are not easy-fixes and will surely make some people uncomfortable. Teachers need to lead the discussions and show us all aspects of those sensitive issues. Classes like that are set to present those topics to us and open our minds. If sensitive topics are banned, I don't see the point of having those classes.

At the very least, when signing up for classes, you should know what to expect going into a class. If a class with sensitive topics is really too much for you to handle, just drop the class. It is selfish to ask for safe space. Other students have the right to have a proper and thought-provoking discussion.

Even though I strongly oppose speech restrictions in class, I do believe a trigger warning is necessary when sensitive topics are coming up. Most teachers I encountered already do this. I believe that is more than sufficient to avoid unwanted exposure to knowledge. Just like movies have a rating system and news videos provide teasers, teachers giving a heads-up will do the job. If a topic coming up is really too much for somebody, you are free to step out. If it is too much for the majority, I believe our teachers would just stop.

To me, respect to others is what actually matters when talking about safe spaces. Not having compulsory safe space rules shows mutual respect. Students can have thought-provoking discussions while not violating people's freedom. To impose safe space rules, on the contrary, will surely infringe people's rights to freedom of speech.

## ***COUNTERPOINT: KEEP AN OPEN MIND, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT PEOPLE ARE GOING THROUGH***

Subjective thinking isn't always the best way to understand other students' experiences, fears and needs. On an objective level, safe spaces for students who feel they need them are something institutions of higher education may need to adopt.

For years students at institutions of higher education have requested, demanded and pled for safe spaces: a place where students can be themselves without fear of criticism or judgement. More recently, several incidents at colleges across the country has made the safe space debate a frequent issue in discussions about academia. But what about Webster? Where do we fall in line with the debate?

In all honestly, you could say Webster already has safe spaces. Whether it be a meeting with your advisor to say you're struggling in classes, or a sit down with a Webster counselor to spill your heart, these meetings are small forms of safe spaces. Students who ask for safe spaces aren't asking for much more than what is already provided. They just want a designated place to open up, so they don't need to seek it out.

I don't need a safe space. But I've been lucky to live a life in which I haven't had anxiety about expressing myself or had any seriously traumatic events happen to me. So when you say students are being coddled, try to keep in mind that old saying about people going through struggles you have no idea about. It's easy to project your own experiences onto fellow students, and forget they are individuals with individual needs.

Of course, there have been safe space situations that were handled poorly. Last year at Mizzou, Concerned Student 1950, a group of student activists at Mizzou, barred a photographer from entering a public space. This led to the firing of then Mizzou professor Melissa Click, after she forced the student photographer away from the protest and asked "for some muscle." I'm not defending Click's actions; as a media member I think she was in the wrong. But it was a jumping off point for the discussion on safe spaces and if they're something higher education should consider.

I'm a firm believer that while academics often know what is best, sometimes students offer an outlook that is hard for our professors and administrators to grasp. Even for me, I can see how a safe space and the hotly debated trigger warnings could coddle a student's learning. But the challenge in front of academia is not to find a way to convince students they don't need safe spaces, but to understand why they need them and hopefully find the solution to that problem.

Saying "no" to students who feel they need a place to feel safe isn't the right answer. I'm not saying flat out saying "yes" is the answer either. An in-depth conversation must be had between the conflicting sides to come to an agreement. It's clear that a portion of our generation feels the need for a place to open up, or a small warning before a particularly graphic part of class.

Yes, college is a time to be challenged and have your mind opened to new ideas that might offend you. But before you jump to a preconceived notion about safe spaces, have a conversation with someone who feels like they really need a place where they can be themselves. After all, every student you sit next to in class has their own struggles, insecurities and problems. It's not so crazy to think that they should have a place to talk about those problems safely and without judgment.

This story by Yue Zhang and Kavahn Mansouri originally appeared in *The Journal*, the student newspaper of Webster University.

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***In a well-written paragraph, explain whether you agree with the point or counterpoint.***