

To Whom It May Concern:

Over the past several days, there have been many misconceptions about Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) and its 9/11 memorial and posters. I hope to dissolve any misconceptions by providing the truth, something too many individuals care too little about. For if we fail to recognize the truth, we fail to recognize justice.

Ripon College Administration has never “banned” the 9/11 memorial or the posters in question. The original YAF article never utilizes the word “ban.” Reporters repeatedly asked me if the College had banned the posters, and I repeatedly replied that “ban” was an inappropriate word for the situation. Many in the media on both sides of the issue made their own assumptions. However, do not mistake this for misinformation on behalf of Ripon College Young Americans for Freedom or Young America’s Foundation.

The Ripon College YAF chapter, founded in late 2015, is relatively new, but it is no stranger to adversity and conflict. We have had to constantly justify our existence and our events on campus. Our 9/11 “Never Forget” posters are presented to the Student Judiciary Board year after year to determine if they violate poster policy, and each year the students on that board decide that they are in accordance with posting policy. It was only this last year that our posters signaled a new investigation by the Bias Incident Response Team.

In our meeting on Tuesday, August 28th, the members of the Bias Incident Response Team stated they had found issues with our posters—which we had displayed last year—as early as September 2017. Ripon College YAF members were informed of this issue in May 2018, during the last weeks of school. This gave us little time to respond, as officers were studying for and taking final exams. In an effort to identify what the specific issues were, I was referred to the Dean of Students. As he was not a member of the Bias Incident Response Team, he was unable to give a clear and concise answer of what was purportedly wrong with our posters.

He then referred me to the Bias Incident Response Team, a board composed of mainly administrators, which ultimately has no power to dictate the actions of student groups, but one who can make recommendations to the administration who then can take action. Why does this board exist? If the school believes in free speech and discussion, it would not have a panel of faculty and administrators that strangles discussion by determining what it feels is “appropriate.” The term “biased” is itself derogatory and used to stifle speech. President Messitte is correct in that the way to deal with speech one disagree with is more posters and speech, but there are groups of students and faculty who prefer to throw about disparaging labels and call certain activities and posters “biased.” Instead of a bias protocol board, the administration might establish a free speech board to ensure all ideas are heard on campus, not just those the school determines are appropriate and will not jostle liberal sensibilities.

Being a conscientious and inquisitive person, I actively pursued this “panel” during the few days I had left in the 2017-2018 school year to find a meeting time. It was unable to meet before the end of the year, and many members were out of office during the summer months. Therefore, the earliest chance we could discuss our September 2017 posters was in late August of 2018, almost a year later. This would only give YAF two weeks to make changes the board found necessary for the 2018 posters. When pressed about why the board took such an unreasonable amount of time to notify us, it was simply written off as a filing error. The first time YAF was informed of what exactly was “wrong” with the posters was in the August 28th meeting.

In the meeting, YAF proposed adding other images to the poster to avoid creating the anti-Muslim bias that the board was convinced our posters exhibited. We were willing to include events like Oklahoma City and other suggestions that the team had. The Bias Incident team told us that these images would appear to be an afterthought and would not make the poster any less of an issue. No matter what YAF offered to add or change about the poster, the team found reasons to disagree. The supposed mediator of the meeting, Dean Ed Wingenbach, was the one who offered the greatest argument of why the posters did not need to be up. We were pressured to make completely new posters. The members of the Bias Incident Response Team found no acceptable way to display these posters.

If anything, the current posters speak out against terrorism. Terrorism is an act of violence against a civilian population by a non-state actor for a political goal. I support speaking out against terrorism, as it is immoral. I am sure there are many of all religions that feel the same way about terrorism. I cannot speak for the Muslim population of my college, as I am not a Muslim. For myself, since I am a Christian, if an individual claiming to be a Christian commits an act of terror, I condemn it. The act of terror is immoral. I would not feel targeted by those who condemn this terror. Furthermore, the majority of victims of radical Islamic terrorism are Muslims. This poster targets individuals that harm, maim, and kill those of Islamic Faith as well as American citizens. In no way is this poster anti-Muslim—it is anti-terrorism. Everything YAF does during the 9/11 week is in order to remember the victims of terrorism and to remind students that terrorism is a very real threat in our world.

As Ripon College’s YAF president, I am both a Ripon College student and a YAF member. Do not mistake this issue for a hatred of the college. I love the educational opportunities and debates the college has to offer. I love the crisp autumn days on campus and the time spent learning from my professors. It is because I love the college that I cannot stand by and watch organizations be pressured into changing the free speech which the college states they support. That is why we fight to keep these posters alive.

In closing, the YAF Chapter members find threats made against the college to be utterly disgusting and of poor character. We plan to put our posters up again this year, whatever backlash they may create. We will also be putting up blank posters next to it to allow other students to write what they think alongside our posters. A student who wished to promote others to express their feelings in a positive way created this idea last year.

YAF, of course, champions free speech from all viewpoints. We would ask the administration to encourage students to not tear down our posters as they have in past years, but to participate in forms of speech that do not destroy our property or any property. We would ask administration to end the atmosphere which it allows to fester against conservatives and to promote the freedom of speech they purportedly hold so dear. Rather than attacking journalists and our YAF chapter for shining light on this troubling situation, Ripon administrators should explain why they fear the truth and then take action to ensure their values of free speech are upheld.

Sincerely,

Hannah M. Krueger
Ripon College Young Americans for Freedom Chapter President