



NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

11480 Commerce Park Drive
Sixth Floor
Reston, Virginia 20191
(703) 318-9608
Fax (703) 318-9122
1-800-USA-1776
www.yaf.org

REAGAN RANCH

217 State Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101
(805) 957-1980
Fax (805) 957-9152
1-888-USA-1776

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June 12, 2020

Mr. David R. Harris
President
Union College
Feigenbaum Hall
Schenectady, New York 12308

*Re: Harassment and Intimidation of Young Americans for
Freedom (YAF) Chapter*

Dear President Harris,

Earlier this week, the Union College Director of Student Activities, Ms. Lauren Dougherty, contacted Mr. Samuel Levit, the Union College Chapter President of Young Americans for Freedom, to compel a meeting to be held on June 11, “to share community feedback regarding social media posts and to discuss ways for engagement with the community moving forward.”

Ms. Dougherty set this meeting because “a few students have reached out asking for the membership and leadership of YAF.” Even the most basic, cursory review of the facts and circumstances by Ms. Dougherty surrounding the inquiries from these “few students” would have quickly revealed their unabashed intent: as far-left agitators they wanted to gain access to the names of YAF members in order to threaten, harass, and intimidate them into silence. Their plan was and remains to “cancel” YAF’s right to exist and participate in the free exchange of ideas. Any reasonable person, especially a seasoned educator like Ms. Dougherty, could see what was happening. The “few students” have very overtly posted their goal:

“This is a clear call for U to make it clear that racists have no place @unioncollege”

“It’s lovely to see everyone collectively shoving their foot up this accounts ass.”

“I didn’t know we had Nazis at Union.”

Prior to the June 11 meeting, Mr. Levit asked Ms. Dougherty to cite the authority under which she was planning to share the names of the YAF chapter's leaders and members with the agitators. At the meeting Ms. Dougherty admitted that Union College does not have such a policy, and then stated that sharing names associated with campus organizations has been the school's "practice." She then surprised Mr. Levit with the news that she had already shared certain YAF names with at least one requester. Earlier today, Ms. Dougherty clarified the school's "practice" stating that the school is simply trying to help prospective members make contact.

Ms. Dougherty's actions and duplicity have been entirely inappropriate and shameful. She intentionally worried Mr. Levit, a young student in the middle of his final exams, that his future might be in jeopardy because Union College was concerned about his perfectly lawful and appropriate social media posts expressing a conservative viewpoint on current events. Union College's heavy-handed tactics undeniably chilled Mr. Levit's and YAF's protected speech and constituted a clear infringement of the First Amendment.


For your information, YAF is non-partisan and possesses a venerable, distinguished history. From its inception in 1960, YAF has provided a forum for American high school and college students to come together to cultivate and grow their shared ideas and commitment to individual freedom, limited government, a strong national defense, free enterprise, and traditional values. The organization was conceived and parented by William F. Buckley, Jr., a giant of the new movement at that time dedicated to conserving the U.S. Constitution and the eternal principles of the American founding. Over the decades, YAF consistently grew in size and influence, becoming a major player on the national scene and attracting many thousands of devoted adherents and champions, including Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Mike Pence, and incoming YAF President Scott Walker.

In May 2011, Young Americans for Freedom ceased its existence as an independent entity and became a project of Young America's Foundation, a recognized 501(c)(3) public charity. Consistent with its tax status, the Foundation never engages in political activity, and instead focuses on its role as a source of information and education. Today, YAF maintains and operates the Reagan Ranch, the National Journalism Center, the Center for Entrepreneurship & Free Enterprise, and operates hundreds of chapters at high schools and universities all across the nation. YAF continues to stand resolute and steadfast as a strictly non-partisan organization dedicated to the very same ideas and principles that not only motivated Bill Buckley and the initial cohort of YAF activists back in 1960, but that motivated our very own Founding Fathers in 1776. YAF's principles and philosophical foundation will forever remain the same, providing an abiding, faithful guide for young Americans here in the 21st century and beyond.

The unprecedented assault by the “few students” seeking to perpetuate their “cancel” culture at Union College, achieved with Ms. Dougherty in the role of knowing and willing accomplice, is reprehensible and cannot stand. These students, who have demonstrated no regard or respect for the speech rights of anyone with whom they disagree, and who have been acting with the complicity of your own Director of Student Activities, have since attacked the YAF chapter’s social media with a barrage of threatening, harassing, and intimidating posts. As a result, nearly half of the Union College YAF chapter members, some 20 students, have indicated their intention to cease their YAF memberships. They understandably fear for their safety on your campus.

Union College tells the world, “[t]he very name "Union" comes from the founders' commitment to inclusion.” You brag to both prospective students and enrolled students, “[a]t Union, you'll be encouraged to challenge yourself and your way of thinking.” If truly you stand by these precepts, you will publicly apologize to Mr. Levit as well as all present and former members of YAF for the actions of your Director of Student Activities in repressing their First Amendment freedom. Show the world that Union College is not opposed to its students expressing the conservative views that have been prevalent in our nation since its inception, regardless of whether a handful of extremist elements on your campus do not want to hear such views. Change your internal practices to ensure that none of your agents, including Ms. Dougherty, ever again take actions that facilitate the scourge of “cancel” culture on your campus.

On behalf of YAF and supporters of Free Speech everywhere, I eagerly await your reply.



Victor E. Bernson, Jr.
Vice President & General Counsel