

Scripps College uninvites George Will because of column on sexual assault

By **Valerie Strauss**

Oct. 8, 2014 at 2:13 p.m. PDT

Syndicated columnist George Will has been uninvited to speak at Scripps College for women as part of a series intended to bring conservative voices to the campus in California because of his op-ed published in The Washington Post about sexual assault that was slammed by critics who accused him of attacking the victims.

According to the conservative student newspaper the Claremont Independent, Will said that he had been invited to speak as part of the Elizabeth Hubert Malott Public Affairs Program that has brought conservatives such as Peggy Noonan and Charles Krauthammer to campus to discuss conservative views that students might not otherwise hear. Will told the Independent that he was later uninvited — “It was in the works and then it wasn’t in the works,” he said — and though he said he hadn’t been given a reason, he knew it was because of his recent column.

That column, which was published June 6, 2014, on The Washington Post’s op-ed page, said in part:

Colleges and universities are being educated by Washington and are finding the experience excruciating. They are learning that when they say campus victimizations are ubiquitous (“micro-aggressions,” often not discernible to the untutored eye, are everywhere), and that when they make victimhood a coveted status that confers privileges, victims proliferate. And academia’s progressivism has rendered it intellectually defenseless now that progressivism’s achievement, the regulatory state, has decided it is academia’s turn to be broken to government’s saddle ...

Meanwhile, the newest campus idea for preventing victimizations — an idea certain to multiply claims of them — is “trigger warnings.” They would be placed on assigned readings or announced before lectures. Otherwise, traumas could be triggered in students whose tender sensibilities would be lacerated by unexpected encounters with racism, sexism, violence (dammit, Hamlet, put down that sword!) or any other facet of reality that might violate a student’s entitlement to serenity. This entitlement has already bred campus speech codes that punish unpopular speech. Now the codes are begetting the soft censorship of trigger warnings to swaddle students in a “safe,” “supportive,” “unthreatening” environment, intellectual comfort for the intellectually dormant.

It is salutary that academia, with its adversarial stance toward limited government and cultural

common sense, is making itself ludicrous. Academia is learning that its attempts to create victim-free campuses — by making everyone hypersensitive, even delusional, about victimizations — brings increasing supervision by the regulatory state that progressivism celebrates.

The Independent noted that four U.S. senators signed a [June 12 letter](#) denouncing the op-ed by Will, writing that his “notion about a perceived privileged status of survivors of sexual assault on campuses runs completely counter to the experiences described to us.” It then quoted from [Will’s response](#),:

“I think I take sexual assault much more seriously than you. Which is why I worry about definitions of that category of that crime that might, by their breadth, tend to trivialize it. And why I think sexual assault is a felony that should be dealt with by the criminal justice system, and not be adjudicated by improvised campus processes.”

Scripps, with about 950 students, is a liberal arts college that is part of The Claremont Colleges consortium in California.

After the Independent ran its Oct. 6 story, Scripps President Lori Bettison-Varga released a [letter](#) to the school community piece explaining why Will was not going to be paid to speak as originally planned. Here’s the text of the letter:

To the Scripps Community:

There has been a good deal of controversy in the last 24 hours over the decision of Scripps College and the Elizabeth Hubert Malott Public Affairs Program to not pay George Will to speak on campus. There are a number of important issues that are being conflated, and I wanted to take a moment to share some perspective.

The issue of sexual assault is complex, serious, and personal to Scripps students. The College has worked on a continuing basis to provide the resources and support to build students’ trust and create a safe and secure campus environment. Scripps College has embraced a “yes means yes” policy, and we have spent the past several years working with our partner institutions to build a shared understanding of consent throughout the Claremont University Consortium community. We continue to work on ways to advance a productive dialogue on the issue of consent that we hope will further the community’s awareness and support.

We invited George Will to speak as part of our Elizabeth Hubert Malott Public Affairs Program because he is a prominent conservative commentator, and we believed our community would benefit from the healthy intellectual debate that has been the hallmark of the program since 2006.

Over the past eight years, the Malott Public Affairs Program has diversified the educational environment for our students by featuring conservative thought leaders in a widely publicized and well-attended event series. We do not shy away from bringing strong conservative viewpoints into our community.

Sexual assault is not a conservative or liberal issue. And it is too important to be trivialized in a political debate or wrapped into a celebrity controversy. For that reason, after Mr. Will authored a column questioning the validity of a specific sexual assault case that reflects similar experiences reported by Scripps students, we decided not to finalize the speaker agreement.

Scripps College is planning next year's Elizabeth Hubert Malott Public Affairs event, which will celebrate the ten-year anniversary of this important program at Scripps College. We will continue to welcome thoughtful, respected speakers representing diverse political perspectives to campus, and we look forward to the stimulating intellectual discourse that will occur as a result.

Sincerely,

Lori Bettison-Varga
President

<http://claremontindependent.com/georg>



Comments are not available on this story.

Share your feedback by emailing the author. Have a question about our comment policies? Review our guidelines or contact the commenting team here.