

Censorship at Concord Academy: It's Not Always Black and White

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At prestigious boarding schools like Deerfield, students tend to develop sophisticated worldviews because they are exposed to incredible diversity at their schools. Furthermore, their perspectives on conflicts in communities both home and abroad are often ones that hold a lot of personal meaning. Deerfield has done many things in the past couple of years to help its community come together and speak out about the problems and conflicts that we face not only at our school but also around our country and the world. Greer Chats are one of the biggest student-lead initiatives for community discussion in which students can go to our Greer Café and attend a student-hosted “chat” focusing on a certain topic or reacting to a recent disciplinary action. Regarding censorship on boarding school campuses, I think Deerfield has done an excellent job in allowing students to speak their minds and making them feel comfortable when representing their views. While they have effectively established a way for students who feel silenced or marginalized to talk about their feelings, they have yet to confront the people on the other side of the issue.

Last year, students put together a Greer Chat focusing on girls at Deerfield and how they are treated on campus. They based the chat off of certain examples of sexism seen by students on campus. In this chat, the fairly obvious targets of the discussion were the boys at Deerfield. During the chat, many boys didn't speak, let alone go, as they felt threatened by the possible repercussions that would arise if they said something that seemed to be “too much.” As a result, not much was accomplished in the Greer Chat, and it seemed more of an introduction to many different examples of sexism, rather than a sophisticated discussion about a pertinent problem between two groups of peoples. And this wasn't the first time a Greer Chat failed to solve a problem. Most times, the majority of people attending the chats are those who feel targeted, and the opposing sides' attendance is scarce. Therefore, the opposing argument can feel alone and threatened therefore unable to speak their honest opinions. The same thing happens in nature. A wolf travels with a pack so that it has others to rely on and therefore derives confidence from its pack. However, a lone wolf feels weak and threatened, and therefore fails to lead. When solving a problem, one must speak with the ‘offender’ in order to cooperate and invent a solution that will help both groups feel as though they live in a safe and comfortable environment. At Deerfield and abroad, the only way we can solve these problems is if we truly minimize the censoring of individuals and facilitate true discussion between the two groups.

How can this be done? Let people talk. When all groups of individuals involved in a conflict feel that they can speak their minds freely, then they will be able to make progress and solve problems; this is the first step to understanding one another and bridging gaps within our communities.