

Prof: Why My University Shutdown My Website and Blog

You might think that student and faculty rights to free speech and academic freedom are overrated. Shouldn't they have the same rights under the First Amendment that all of us have? Well, [they do, but they don't](#).

Professors and students often communicate their thoughts on blogs on university websites on university servers. University administrators understand these websites to be, like the servers that host them, university property. The worry they have is that ideas expressed on these sites could be mistaken to represent the views of the university as a whole. So, universities have the authority, their reasoning goes, to take down faculty and student websites when their authors' expressions get too controversial.

I had my website and blog shut down after an article about my employer Penn State, its alumni and the Sandusky scandal was [published on Truthout](#). My website and blog came back online weeks later, but only after a former student of mine complained through the university's anonymous [ethics and compliance reporting system](#).

When I recently told a fellow faculty member about this incident, he shared another story that I have since confirmed. A student who was raped on our main campus also had her student website and blog removed by university administrators. She had started blogging criticisms of the university police for their handling of her case. It seems that silencing students works better than engaging them. Unsurprisingly, Penn State was recently smacked with a [\\$2 million fine for violating the Clery Act](#), a federal law requiring public

disclosure of on-campus crime.

I spoke to a professor at another higher ed institution whose website mysteriously went 'out of service' soon after he blogged a series of vicious criticisms of politicians in the state capital (the same ones who appropriate funding for his public university). He jokingly declared, "My uni blog just went down the memory hole!"

The ['memory hole'](#) is a reference to the chute that went straight to an incinerator in George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (see clip below). It served to remove embarrassing documents, photos and transcripts (insert: websites) that could be interpreted as inconsistent with the Truth Ministry's propaganda:

In the walls of the cubicle there were three orifices. [...] For some reason they were nicknamed memory holes. When one knew that any document was due for destruction, or even when one saw a scrap of waste paper lying about, it was an automatic action to lift the flap of the nearest memory hole and drop it in, whereupon it would be whirled away on a current of warm air to the enormous furnaces which were hidden somewhere in the recesses of the building.

There are exceptions, such as Northwestern University. The university's administrators permitted one of its faculty members, a Holocaust denier, to publish his ideas on [his university website](#). When pressed by the Simon Weisenthal Center to shut down the site, [Northwestern's president defended him](#), claiming that the "network is a free and open forum for the expression of ideas, [and] the expression of personal opinion . . . [does not necessarily represent the] views of Northwestern University." Indeed, the [1940 Statement on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#) states that when college and university faculty express themselves as citizens, they remain "scholars and educational officers," and therefore need only "indicate that they are not speaking for the institution."

Perhaps those wacky professors and students blogging about their ridiculous conspiracy theories should be reined in. Or maybe we should stand up for them. It's always possible we could be the next in line for official censorship. And none of us wants the nanny state to rear its ugly head, sending our

blogs down the memory hole!

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