

# LA Times Editorial Board: Dear Colleges, Stop Squeezing Free Speech

A couple of weeks ago, my colleague Annie Holmquist [wrote about](#) Kevin Shaw, a student at California's Pierce College, whom college officials threatened to kick off campus because he was handing out copies of the U.S. Constitution to interested students.

Considering [all the things](#) happening on college campuses these days, cracking down on students offering literature to one another seems rather bizarre, especially when the act is occurring in spaces that are essentially public.

The *Los Angeles Times* editorial board appears to agree. In [a recent editorial](#), the *Times* takes to task colleges attempting to squeeze free speech into tiny "zones."

*"No one would suggest that every inch of a campus must be open to leafleting and political proselytizing. Dormitories, dining halls and classrooms are different from open spaces and sidewalks. (Pierce's campus also includes a farm used for the college's agricultural and equestrian programs. A student milking a cow shouldn't be interrupted by a political spiel any more than a student dissecting a lab specimen or translating a poem.)*

*But when a public college or university squeezes the expression of political views into a tightly circumscribed area, it not only undermines its commitment to the free exchange of ideas; it runs afoul of the 1st Amendment.*

*As a federal judge put it in a 2004 case involving a challenge to limitations on expression at Texas Tech University Law School: 'To the extent [that] the campus has*

*park areas, sidewalks, streets, or other similar common areas, these areas are public forums, at least for the university's students, irrespective of whether the university has so designated them or not.'*

*The community college district should see this lawsuit as a learning experience. The lesson is that its view of the 1st Amendment – like the space in which Pierce College apparently wanted to confine Kevin Shaw and his advocacy – is too small.”*

It's strange how universities–institutions that once served as the vanguard of free expression–have evolved into places [notably hostile to free speech](#).

At a time when support for free speech is [historically low](#), It's encouraging to see prestigious institutions like the *Times* speak out in support of the issue.

Let's hope other media and intellectual organizations do the same.