

## Fox News Contributor, Professors Face Off in Free Speech Debate

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**Panelists visiting GW debated whether or not liberals suppressed intellectual diversity on college campuses Tuesday.**

The debate, hosted by Intelligence Squared, a non-profit group that organizes discussions around the country, engaged about 100 people in the Jack Morton Auditorium. John Donovan, an author and ABC news correspondent, moderated the event.

Audience members were invited to vote on whether they thought liberals discouraged intellectual diversity on college campuses before and after the discussion. When it began, 33 percent said liberals suppressed intellectual diversity, while 21 percent said they disagreed and 46 percent were undecided.

Both sides agreed that the right to free speech much be encouraged on college campuses across America, but disagreed on the best way to reach that ideal. They also agreed that college administrations, rather than faculty or students, are often to blame for limitations on free speech.

Greg Lukianoff, the president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, began the debate by condemning what he called the “liberal dominance” at colleges. Most schools have an overwhelming majority of left-leaning students and faculty, which pushes right-leaning students to becoming “closeted conservatives” who are unable to express themselves comfortably, he said.

He pointed to times he’d seen students with less common opinions or strong religious beliefs face bias and unfair treatment against a backdrop of primarily liberal campuses.

“Though I’m an atheist, I am horrified at the attempts to discourage campus evangelicals,” he said.

Kirsten Powers, a USA Today columnist and Fox News contributor, referenced a recent incident at Marquette University, where a professor was expelled for encouraging debate on the issue of gay marriage in one of his classes.

Powers argued that college should be an exploratory environment where students “should feel challenged and allowed to make mistakes.”

On the other side, Jeremy Mayer, an associate professor in the School of Policy, Government and International Affairs at George Mason University, said that “portrait of the liberal campus” was incomplete.

Mayer argued that the high proportion of liberal faculty at U.S. universities could be attributed to “the market keeping conservatives from wanting to join the academy,” rather than universities discriminating against conservative outlooks.

Angus Johnston, a professor of history at the City University of New York and founder of StudentActivism.net, argued that campuses are full of meaningful, diverse dialogue.

“The American campus today is a site of robust, passionate debate and a haven for young people. I would encourage you all to avoid stereotyping who is censoring and who is silencing,” Johnston said.

After the debate, 59 percent of attendees sided with Lukianoff and Powers, 32 percent sided with Johnston and Mayer, and 9 percent said they were still undecided.