

Responses to Interview Questions for the Winonan
Dr. Barry A. Peratt to Sophia Sailer
October 14, 2021

In the worldview section of your website, it states that the LGBTQ+ has instated a “religious censor” and can be anti-intellectual, what experiences and stories have led you to this conclusion?

My first experience occurred in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. I hung on the wall outside my office door an ad from the New York Times by an ex-gay group, inviting those with unwanted same-sex attraction to consider that they might find freedom from those attractions. Nothing in the ad condemned gay people. Almost immediately, I was denounced by members of the LGBTQ+ community as a homophobe and accused of creating a hostile environment. Routinely, members of that community would tear the posting off the wall. (One such person was a feminist, lesbian faculty member, though most were students). Members of my department who are LGBTQ+ allies voted against me for tenure, specifically citing this incident as their reason for doing so. Finally, an official complaint was filed against me by several faculty members, at which point I retained the services of Jordan Lorence from the Northstar Legal Foundation in Fairfax, VA. He wrote a letter indicating his eagerness to take on my case, which I forwarded to the legal counsel of the university. That abruptly put an end to the multi-year episode.

Routinely since then, I have been contacted, sometimes by students themselves, but usually by the administration who relays complaints that have been lodged with them regarding articles that are posted outside my office door. They usually ask me to remove the postings, and I refuse each time, citing my free speech rights and the need for intellectual diversity on campus.

How have you known them to be LGBTQ+ people from the exterior appearance only?

Exterior appearance played no role. They identified themselves to me as LGBTQ+, or they were out and generally known to be LGBTQ+.

Why do you think LGBTQ+ people specifically have targeted your religion?

I don’t think they target religion, per se. I believe that, to them, there are certain points of view which must never be challenged or even questioned. If my religion (Catholicism) did not present a vision of human sexuality that differs from their own, I don’t believe members of the community would be so hostile to it.

How have people in general been bigoted toward your religion?

A bigot is “one who is strongly partial to one’s own group, religion, race, or politics and is *intolerant of those who differ*.”¹ In that regard, the bigotry I have experienced has been from people in the LGBTQ+ community, secular feminists, and pro-choice individuals. They have not only stood against my beliefs, which is fine, but against my right to freely express them, which is bigotry. Pro-choice individuals have proven to be particularly aggressive, disrupting peaceful prayer vigils such as the Life Chain with vulgar chants and lewd gestures, mocking the Rosary or the Blessed Virgin, screaming at my 10-year-old daughter that her mother doesn’t love her, erasing chalked messages from the pro-life group, etc.

As a math professor, why is it important to have religion involved in your website?

Religion is not on my course webpage; it is on my personal webpage. I assume that those who choose to view it are interested in personal details about me. The most important aspect of my identity is that I am a follower of Jesus Christ, and so I share that. I have found great freedom in Christ and want to share that freedom with others.

Do you think WSU is a safe space for Christianity and religious people in general?

Absolutely not, and I would not want it to be! Safe spaces tend to foster psychologically and emotionally fragile individuals. Resiliency develops in an environment in which one’s beliefs are challenged. That is one reason I’m a fervent advocate for free speech and intellectual diversity on campus.

Do you think WSU is a liberal place that pushes its views onto others?

I noticed in my e-mail yesterday that the sociology department is currently promoting a speaker that is lauded by Planned Parenthood, which is fine. But when was the last time an academic department sponsored a pro-life activist, such as Alveda King (niece of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)? When was the last time the Office for Inclusion & Diversity promoted a conservative Black leader like Candace Owens or Larry Elder, instead of an anti-racist, to provide perspective on race relations in this country?

You see? That doesn’t happen here. And when student groups attempt to bring in such speakers, they often struggle to find a faculty advisor willing to support them.

But this state of affairs is not necessarily intentional. It is the natural by-product of *an appalling lack of intellectual diversity on campus*. The power structure at WSU is so dominated by people on the political left that it is easy for us to forget there are other well-reasoned, well-informed points of view. For this reason, I laud President Olson’s leadership in the creation of a Free Speech Values Statement for the WSU community (<https://www.winona.edu/President/strategic.asp>).

¹ American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition

What would you want out of WSU to be more tolerable for religious people?

Tolerance refers to how we treat *people*, not *ideas*. It is necessary for each of us to respect our fellow human beings, but such respect does not – and cannot – require us to affirm another’s beliefs or keep silent about our own.

Other comments?

Since I have attached below the relevant portions from three previous years’ syllabi, one reasonable question that could be raised is, “Why did you single out gender ideology specifically in your syllabi?” The answer is simple. I hang multiple articles outside my office door touching on several different current events and challenging the politically correct views on them. Yet, it remains a stubborn fact that virtually all the attempts to silence me over the years have come from individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. When I learned from multiple students that they routinely self-censor rather than challenge the LGBTQ+ ideology on campus or in the classroom, I decided to address this issue head on so that those students might understand that their ideas, too, should be part of the “diversity” we claim to value at WSU. I eventually made clear in my syllabi that I reject the notion that any challenge to LGBTQ+ ideology is homophobic or transphobic and believe these terms are often weaponized to exclude, from public discourse, challenges to the dominant cultural narrative on human sexuality. I call this “gender totalitarianism.” We must progress beyond it if we want to be a truly tolerant and intellectually diverse campus.

From Spring Semester 2016:

5 Commitment to Inclusive Excellence

WSU recognizes that our individual differences can deepen our understanding of one another and the world around us, rather than divide us. In this class, people of all ethnicities, genders and gender identities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and nationalities are strongly encouraged to share their rich array of perspectives and experiences. If you feel your differences may in some way isolate you from WSU’s community or if you have a need of any specific accommodations, please speak with the instructor early in the semester about your concerns and what we can do together to help you become an active and engaged member of our class and community.

Relevant resources are available at the Inclusion and Diversity website: www.winona.edu/diversity.

Because there are several students who have previously had questions about this in the past, I will emphasize that even though there is no “religious advocate” listed on the WSU diversity website, religion is *not* to be considered an orphan to the above statement on inclusion. As long as you hold your religious views respectfully, you should feel welcomed to express them publicly, and even defend and promote them vigorously, without being labeled a “bigot” or being accused of “hate speech.” Such labels are themselves intended to marginalize, exclude, and intimidate and do not belong in a truly inclusive environment. The radical philosophy behind a truly inclusive, tolerant, and diverse environment is that good, reasonable, and well-intentioned people can disagree about very important things and nevertheless remain friendly with one another and can benefit greatly from an often rich interaction that springs from their differences.

From Spring 2021:

8 Commitment to Inclusive Excellence

The Office of Inclusion and Diversity encourages all professors to include the following statement in their syllabi:

WSU recognizes that our individual differences can deepen our understanding of one another and the world around us, rather than divide us. In this class, people of all ethnicities, genders and gender identities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and nationalities are strongly encouraged to share their rich array of perspectives and experiences. If you feel your differences may in some way isolate you from WSU's community or if you have a need of any specific accommodations, please speak with the instructor early in the semester about your concerns and what we can do together to help you become an active and engaged member of our class and community. Relevant resources are available at the Inclusion and Diversity website: www.winona.edu/diversity.

- **My Rejection of “Gender Totalitarianism”:** By “gender totalitarianism” I mean the notion that the currently popular version of gender theory is the only correct way to view human sexuality, and that any dissent from this view is necessarily motivated by ignorance, hatred, and bigotry and should therefore be suppressed. What began decades ago as a legitimate plea for tolerance has morphed, in recent years, into a demand for absolute conformity. Efforts to marginalize and exclude from public discourse those who question the dominant cultural narrative on human sexuality are often punctuated by accusations of homophobia, transphobia, and hate speech, regardless of the manner in which the dissenting opinion is expressed. As such, they reveal a lack of tolerance and a resistance to true intellectual diversity.
- **My Commitment to Diversity:** For various philosophical, scientific, psychological, sociological, and historical reasons, I and several of my colleagues (most of whom wish to remain in the closet) maintain our right to reject much of the aforementioned gender theory. My personal belief system dictates that I strive to treat *all* members of the human family with fairness and respect, and you can expect as much from me as an instructor. (In fact, I value the many friendships I maintain with people who hold beliefs different from my own.)

However, I also vigorously reject the notion that such respect demands that I either affirm the worldview of certain individuals or suppress my own, or that it requires me to publicly confess something I believe to be untrue. My position crafts a balance between the university's Commitment to Inclusive Excellence stated above and its recently adopted Values Statement on Free Speech and Academic Freedom available at www.winona.edu/President/strategic.asp.

In fact, it takes only about one millisecond of thought to realize that a truly diverse and tolerant atmosphere is absolutely not possible without a commitment to freedom of thought and speech. One of my favorite quotes is from Ruth Simmons, the first African-American woman president of an Ivy League university (Brown University). This quote was given at a convocation speech in 2001: “The protection of speech that is offensive or insulting to us is one of the most difficult, difficult things that we do. While confidence may be found in silence, truth cannot dwell there.”

From Fall 2021:

8 Commitment to Inclusive Excellence

The Office of Inclusion and Diversity encourages all professors to include the following statement in their syllabi:

WSU recognizes that our individual differences can deepen our understanding of one another and the world around us, rather than divide us. In this class, people of all ethnicities, genders and gender identities, religions, ages, sexual orientations, disabilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, regions, and nationalities are strongly encouraged to share their rich array of perspectives and experiences. If you feel your differences may in some way isolate you from WSU's community or if you have a need of any specific accommodations, please speak with the instructor early in the semester about your concerns and what we can do together to help you become an active and engaged member of our class and community.

Relevant resources are available at the Inclusion and Diversity website: www.winona.edu/diversity.

- **My Rejection of “Intellectual Totalitarianism”:** By “totalitarianism” I mean the notion that the currently popular version of an intellectual theory (such as Critical Race Theory or LGBTQ+ Theory) is the only correct way to view things that any dissent from this view is necessarily motivated by ignorance, hatred, and bigotry and should therefore be suppressed. What began decades ago by some groups as a legitimate plea for tolerance has morphed, in recent years, into a demand for absolute conformity. Efforts to marginalize and exclude from public discourse those who question the dominant cultural narrative on human sexuality or race are often punctuated by accusations of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and hate speech, regardless of the manner in which the dissenting opinion is expressed. As such, they reveal a lack of tolerance and a resistance to true intellectual diversity.
- **My Commitment to Diversity:** My personal belief system dictates that I strive to treat *all* members of the human family with fairness and respect, and you can expect as much from me as an instructor. (In fact, I value the many friendships I maintain with people who hold beliefs different from my own.)

However, I also vigorously reject the notion that such respect demands that I either affirm the worldview of certain individuals or suppress my own, or that it requires me to publicly confess something I believe to be untrue. My position crafts a balance between the university's Commitment to Inclusive Excellence stated above and its recently adopted Values Statement on Free Speech and Academic Freedom available at www.winona.edu/President/strategic.asp.

The thriving of any intellectual community in pursuit of truth depends on free speech. One of my favorite quotes is from Ruth Simmons, the first African-American woman president of an Ivy League university (Brown University). This quote was given at a convocation speech in 2001: “The protection of speech that is offensive or insulting to us is one of the most difficult, difficult things that we do. While confidence may be found in silence, truth cannot dwell there.”