



Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario
Fédération canadienne des étudiantes et étudiants–Ontario
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MEDIA RELEASE

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Government Free Speech Policy sets dangerous precedent on Ontario campuses

Toronto, ON - On Thursday, August 30, the provincial government mandated all publicly-assisted colleges and universities to develop policies on freedom of speech by January 1, 2019.

Students across the province are concerned about the government’s approach to defining freedom of speech, the timeline for policy implementation and the criteria which all institutions must abide by.

Students have long advocated for freedom of speech and expression, open discussion, free inquiry and academic freedom. However, in recent years we have seen the concept of free speech co-opted to protect and defend hate speech on campus.

“The rhetoric of defending free speech is used to protect racist, homophobic, transphobic and otherwise oppressive discourse on campuses and to silence any dissent against them.” Said Nour Alideeb, Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario. “All students have the inherent right to attend post-secondary education without fear of their humanity or identity coming under attack.”

Colleges and universities currently have policies that protect free speech on campus, as well as student codes of conduct and collective agreements that outline disciplinary procedures. Implementing a policy within three months will circumvent many institutional structures such as academic senates, advisory committees and stakeholder meetings, and neglect meaningful and vital consultation processes.

“Defining free speech is part of an ongoing important discussion in academia. By imposing such a short timeline for these policies to be developed, the government is undermining existing academic governance structures, which provide space for faculty, students and institutional stakeholders to express their opinions.” Said Alideeb.

The Federation is among various sector stakeholders concerned that this proposal is aimed at undermining college and university administrations, faculty and students who defend the right to classrooms and campuses free of bigotry and hate speech.

The Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario is the largest and oldest student organization in Ontario, representing more than 350,000 college and university students in all regions of

the province. One of the longstanding campaigns of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario is the United for Equity campaign that seeks to challenge racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism and colonialism on our campuses and within our communities.

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