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# Shouting Down Talk on Campus Free Speech

Speaker at CUNY law school interrupted repeatedly by those who said he shouldn't have been permitted there.

April 16, 2018

Josh Blackman is a regular guest lecturer on college campuses and writes regularly for conservative publications. A law professor at the South Texas College of Law, he focuses on legal issues. Of late, he has been talking about the legal and philosophical reasons to support free speech on college campuses.

Last week he [shared video \(http://joshblackman.com/blog/2018/04/12/students-at-cuny-law-proteted-heckled-my-lecture-about-free-speech-on-campus/\)](http://joshblackman.com/blog/2018/04/12/students-at-cuny-law-proteted-heckled-my-lecture-about-free-speech-on-campus/) of an appearance he made in late March at the City University of New York law school, where he couldn't give his planned talk on free speech as he was heckled and shouted down during the first 10 minutes. During that time period, there were far

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## Importance of Free Speech on Campus [...]



The protesters stood all over the room, including at the front, where Blackman was attempting to talk. He said he wouldn't have been bothered by their standing there -- with signs denouncing him -- had they remained quiet. But until they all left, they interrupted from all around the room.

The students protesting the event called Blackman a white supremacist and racist, and some shouted, "Fuck the law." Many said

that CUNY should not have permitted Blackman to speak, given the law school's mission, which focuses on the public interest, public service and diversifying the legal profession.

The video of the incident arrives at a time when many higher education leaders have expressed concern about the impact of such incidents on the image of higher education. Even if the overwhelming majority of campus speakers, including those expressing conservative views, are not heckled, such incidents have attracted widespread attention from political leaders.


Higher education leaders have argued that there is a wide consensus among their ranks to support free speech and to oppose the shouting down of speakers. And [a new poll \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/10/survey-finds-strong-support-college-presidents-free-speech-campus\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/04/10/survey-finds-strong-support-college-presidents-free-speech-campus) from the American Council on Education backs that view. But when incidents happen, college leaders do not seem to agree on the steps to take to prevent a disruption or whether to punish those who disrupt.

Most of the incidents of speakers being shouted down have involved undergraduates, but some observers have expressed particular concern when shouting down takes place at law schools, given the importance of the First Amendment to higher education and to American society. In March, such an incident took place at the [law school of Lewis & Clark College \(https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/06/students-interrupt-several-portions-speech-christina-hoff-sommers\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/06/students-interrupt-several-portions-speech-christina-hoff-sommers), where Christina Hoff Sommers, whose writings attack feminists, was shouted down.

At CUNY, Blackman was invited by the student chapter of the Federalist Society, a conservative legal organization. When the society started to promote the event, some students objected. The law school sent a campus-wide email stating that Blackman had a right to speak, and that protests were welcome, but not if they

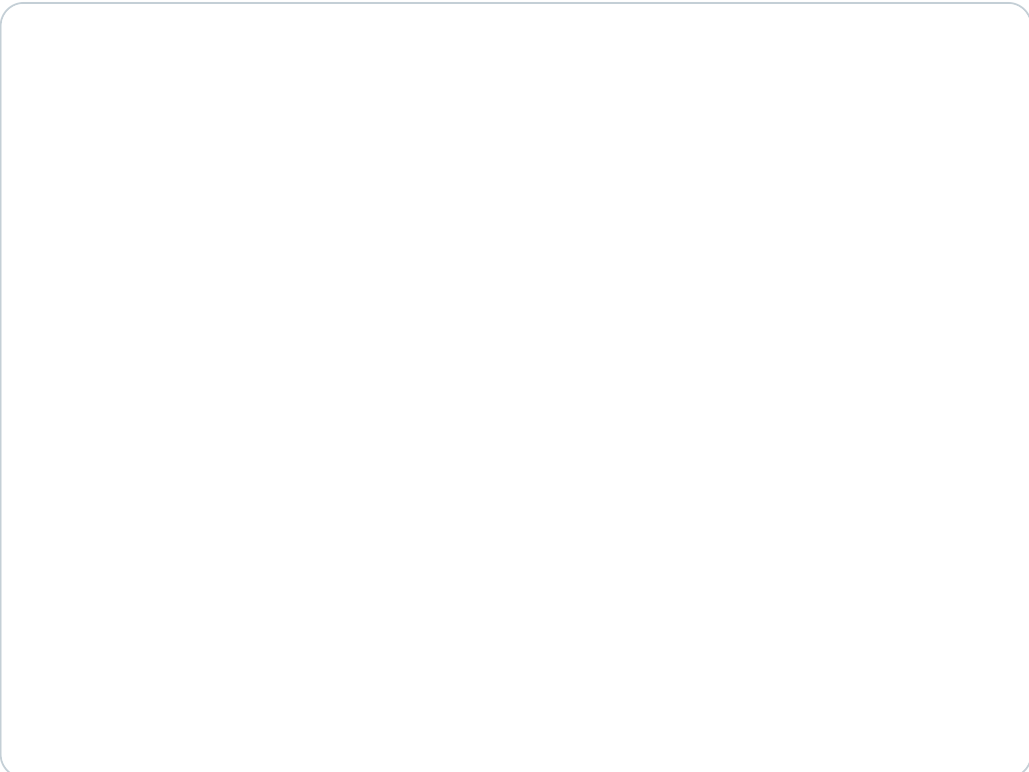
campuses includes support for the right to appear of people like Milo Yiannopoulos and Ann Coulter, whose speeches on campuses regularly feature insults against various groups.

The students said that CUNY law was effectively giving a platform for the idea that those speakers -- whose presence causes pain to some students -- should be allowed to appear on campus.



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Free speech is not an invite for hate speech. Get it away from our campus!!!




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Others cited Blackman's support for President Trump's decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Here, however, Blackman's position may be more nuanced than the students have acknowledged.

Blackman has [written that Trump made the right decision](#)



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(<https://www.lawfareblog.com/understanding-sessionss-justification-rescind-daca>), but he said that is based on Blackman's view that President Obama exceeded his legal authority in creating DACA. Trump has only sometimes said that he would back legislation to restore DACA in a way that does not face legal challenges (and he doesn't say that now). Republican leaders in Congress have opposed a legislative fix for the situation.

But Blackman has called on Congress to restore the DACA program. And he told the CUNY law students of his position, although it was unclear if they believed him.

Via email on Sunday, Mary Lu Bilek, dean of the law school, said that the protest was reasonable because the disruptions ended relatively early in the time frame of the appearance.

"For the first eight minutes of the 70-minute event, the protesting students voiced their disagreements. The speaker engaged with them. The protesting students then filed out of the room, and the event proceeded to its conclusion without incident," Bilek said.

"This non-violent, limited protest was a reasonable exercise of protected free speech, and it did not violate any university policy," she added. "CUNY Law students are encouraged to develop their own perspectives on the law in order to be prepared to confront our most difficult legal and social issues as lawyers promoting the values of fairness, justice, and equality."

## Protest at Duke

questioned the tactic of interrupting an event.

Read more by [Scott Jaschik](#)



[\(/print/news/2018/04/16/guest-lecture-free-speech-cuny-law-school-heckled\)](https://www.insidehighered.com/print/news/2018/04/16/guest-lecture-free-speech-cuny-law-school-heckled)

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