



2016-06

Freedom Of Speech Is Not Freedom From Disagreement
by Morrie Barembaum

There was a time in our culture when people espoused the belief that "I disagree with everything you say, but I will defend your right to say it." I am not sure if that is taught anymore.

About five years ago, the Israeli Ambassador to the US, Michael Oren, gave a speech at the University of California, Irvine. I was in attendance and I observed students [attempting to shout him down](#).

More recently, the president of California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) tried to disinvite a conservative pundit, Benjamin Shapiro, from giving a talk on diversity. While the CSULA president relented and allowed Mr. Shapiro to speak, students resorted to violence in an [effort to block](#) other students and community members from attending. A student was quoted as saying that while she believed in the First Amendment, she did not want Mr. Shapiro to speak because he is a racist.

However, is that how the First Amendment works? Everyone is allowed to speak their mind—so long as you agree with their point of view? Of course not. For freedom of speech to mean something, everyone must be allowed to express themselves—even if those ideas contradict your own.

We, as educators, must teach our students to respect people whose opinions differ from our own. Not only because of the First Amendment but because that is a hallmark of an academic institution: to engage in civil discourse involving opposing viewpoints. If one truly wants to express one's displeasure with the speaker, there are non-violent options available.

It's time we got back to protecting this fundamental belief. If you don't agree, that's your right; but let the conversation go forward. At the end of the day, the better speech will prevail. What better lesson to teach our students and to model ourselves.