

## Terry Newman: UBC profs push back against campus wokeism with 'dangerous ideas' course

Could this be the beginning of the end of the strangling speech restrictions at Canadian universities?

Last updated Jan 22, 2026



*Students prepare for debate during class at UBC Okanagan's Dangerous Ideas course. Photo: LinkedIn/UBCOkanagan*

A new course you probably wouldn't expect to exist at a Canadian university just wrapped up. "Dangerous Ideas" invited students to tackle difficult and polarizing topics by debating both sides, and the students loved it — suggesting that they would rather examine and discuss ideas than be told that they're off-limits. Could this be the

beginning of the end of wokeism in Canadian universities?

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

[Dangerous Ideas](#) is an upper-level combined political science and philosophy seminar course created by [Brad Epperly](#) and [Renaud-Philippe Garner](#), who work at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus in Kelowna, B.C. According to its syllabus, the course allows students to tackle controversial topics that some people might deem dangerous, including freedom of speech, anti-racism, academic freedom, Zionism and colonialism.



NP

This newsletter tackles hot topics with boldness, verve and wit.  
(Subscriber-exclusive edition on Fridays)

By signing up you consent to receive the above newsletter from Postmedia Network Inc.

The evidence that Canadian universities have needed a course like this has been piling up for over two decades. In 2002, protesters at Concordia University in Montreal broke a window and [hurled furniture](#) into a building where Benjamin Netanyahu was scheduled to speak.

The talk was [cancelled](#) and so were classes for the rest of the day. At the time, Netanyahu denounced Canada and Concordia for their inability to control the protesters and suggested that the university should be “cleaned up.”

It hasn't just been outside speakers whose ideas have been deemed too dangerous to air. Professors and students have also been shut down.

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

In 2016, [Jordan Peterson](#), who was a University of Toronto psychology professor at the time, expressed his [concern](#) that proposed federal human rights legislation would treat his refusal to use alternate pronouns like “they” “ze” and “zir” as hate speech. This led to protests, a loss of funding and an endless stream of hit pieces.

The following year at Wilfrid Laurier University, Lindsay Shepherd, who was a teaching assistant at the time, showed a short clip of Peterson debating gender-neutral pronouns in front of her communications class.

Shortly afterwards, she was brought into a closed-door meeting, where she was [accused](#) of a number of ridiculous things, including “neutrally playing a speech by Hitler,” and was told that even showing the clip and asking the students to discuss it was legitimizing Peterson’s views.

These are all high-profile events, which might lead you to believe that, if this is all that’s happening on university campuses, things aren’t really that bad. But several campus surveys have suggested otherwise.

A [2025 survey](#) found that more than half of students were reluctant to discuss transgenderism and the Israel-Hamas conflict. Almost half wouldn’t even talk about politics, and a majority were in favour of limiting free expression on campuses.

This kind of thinking isn’t limited to universities. A 2023 [Angus Reid survey](#) found that 58 per cent Canadians believed it was acceptable for universities to ban speakers who promote offensive views on race and gender.

Dangerous ideas bypasses any attempt at deplatforming because, in signing up for the course, students are made aware that they will be engaging with issues they may not automatically agree with and will also have to examine their own firmly held beliefs.

The seminar works like this: Students are randomly assigned a side to argue on a topic and organized into debate teams. Those not assigned a topic that week judge which side was most persuasive. Students are given readings before each debate and are required to submit their team’s arguments before the debate takes place.

And it appears as though the course was well-received by the

students, if a [video](#) posted to UBC Okanagan's LinkedIn page is any indication. In it, three students of different backgrounds praise the course.

One student said, "I think debate is very important because in today's society emotions have really dominated politics, and a lot of the time people are actually unable to explain why they think a certain way, other than because they feel a certain way." Another student said that what the course taught was the difference between defending your ideas and yourself.

This advertisement has not loaded yet, but your article continues below.

The third one said she was surprised by how willing students were to engage with controversial ideas and found that many of the issues were a lot more nuanced than she originally thought. She feels the course is unique because it was set up in such a way that the students were all in it together, and this made them feel comfortable sharing their beliefs, something she said can normally be "really, really scary."

Could this be the beginning of the end of the strangling speech restrictions and wokeism at Canadian universities? Maybe.

Perhaps Garner and Epperly should take the model for this class on a campus tour and show other Canadian universities how it's done.