

April 19th, 2023

With regard to the decision by the 2022-2023 ASWU Assembly to deny Xi Van Fleet as a campus speaker,

When reading the document titled, “Whitworth’s Statement on Freedom of Expression and Civil Discourse for Our Campus Community”, published by Whitworth University, it is apparent that Whitworth values and prides itself upon presenting its community members with a safe space for civil discourse. This is something that is immensely important and has been heavily emphasized to the 2022-2023 ASWU assembly members throughout the year in various trainings. On the 12th of April, 2023, the Whitworth ASWU assembly voted to deny Turning Point USA the ability to bring in Xi Van Fleet as a speaker. Xi Van Fleet is a public figure who spends most of her time speaking about her experience living in China during Mao’s Cultural Revolution.

In just this last month alone, Xi Van Fleet has posted a number of potentially harmful and offensive things to her Twitter page. In one of these tweets, she refers to transgenderism as “insanity”. She also takes the time to teach her followers the word “Baizuo” and even goes so far as to post a video with the proper pronunciation of this word. It is a derogatory term used to refer to white liberals and their values. Additionally, she retweeted a fake headline published by the “Babylon Bee” which was titled, “...Chinese military will now be trained to shout wrong pronouns at American troops”. This fake news article was written to satirize the growing movement within the U.S. to learn about and respect the pronouns of others. Lastly, she implied that a plus-sized woman who called for airlines to provide plus-sized passengers with more room in order that they might be comfortable on their flight. These tweets are just a few in a long series of offensive and exclusive rhetoric on her page.

The University’s statement of freedom of expression states, “We exhort one another to tame the tongue’s power to do harm...” The 2022-2023 ASWU assembly felt that the tweets made by Xi Van Fleet included in this document, as well as plenty of others on her timeline, exhibited a lack of taming in this regard. The University’s statement also states that Whitworth aims to ready graduates to express themselves in ways that affirm “the life, dignity, and image of God reflected in each person”. By openly making fun of LGBTQ+ lifestyles (i.e. using the term “insanity” in reference to them, satirizing pronoun preferences, etc.), the assembly felt that Xi Van Fleet was not in adherence with this portion of the statement.

In rebuttal to this argument, some posed the issue of conversation topic. Having been asked to come in to speak on her experience in China during Mao’s Cultural Revolution, some members of the assembly and guests felt that the topic of her speech and her offensive rhetoric would be separate. In response to this argument, some assembly members mentioned that there was no evidence of Xi Van Fleet speaking about her experience in China without also incorporating her exclusionary rhetoric.

The assembly team made their decision with the above values in mind. The club who tried to bring Xi Van Fleet onto campus, Turning Point USA, was also made aware that they could still have her come to campus if they got it approved by a Whitworth department rather than the student body. Additionally, anyone who brings a vote to the assembly has the option to

move forward with an appeal process which can be found on our website ([whitworthaswu.com](http://whitworthaswu.com)). Lastly, clubs are not allowed to bring in speakers unless their club advisor has gone through advisor training. Their advisor, Rod Sandberg, has not done that as of today. We have allowed this club to bring in speakers throughout the year because we knew that their chartering date made it difficult to abide by this rule and it would severely limit them in how much time they had this year to bring speakers in. That being said, the assembly does not technically have to hear or allow any speakers for this club until Mr. Sandberg goes through the training process.

It should be noted that this was not a unanimous decision amongst the assembly. The final vote resulted with nine members opposing Xi Van Fleet's presence on campus, four members in favor of it, and two members abstaining. Whether or not one agrees with the outcome of the vote, there is evidence that the assembly did have the values and ideas of the Whitworth University statement of free expression in mind when voting.

In love and service,  
Georgia Goff  
ASWU President, 2022-2023