

Response to The Harvard Crimson

By David Kane, former Preceptor in Statistical Methods and Mathematics, Department of Government, Harvard University

The *Harvard Crimson* sought to cancel me. In an October 1, 2020 editorial, they wrote:

Government Preceptor David D. Kane is facing [allegations](#) that he authored a number of racist blog posts under the pseudonym “David Dudley Field ’25” on a site he created in 2003 called EphBlog. ... One post states that fewer than one in 10 Black students at Williams College would have earned admission if it weren’t for their race. Another argues that there there should be a place at Williams for Identity Evropa: an American neo-Nazi and white supremacist group whose leader openly advocates for the “Nazification of America.”

Although I have shut down EphBlog, the posts in question are still available via the Wayback Machine. If that is “racist content,” then open discussion of controversial topics by untenured faculty is impossible.

First, an empirical question: **What would Black enrollment at elite colleges like Williams or Harvard be in the absence of affirmative action?** The consensus of the academic literature is clear. Black enrollment would be much lower, which is why Harvard, and all elite colleges, insist on the necessity of race-conscious admissions. Espenshade and Chung (2005) provide a useful introduction to this topic. See Arcidiacono, Kinsler and Ranson (2020) for a more modern approach. Scholars differ on the exact decrease in Black enrollment which would result from the end of race-conscious admissions, but all agree that it would be substantial. Harvard admits as much (Walsh, 2021) in its legal filings in the on-going *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* litigation.

Second, a policy question: **Should Williams (or Harvard) students be punished for expressing their political views?** No! At least, that is my belief. A student should be able to hang up a poster on her door or wear a t-shirt which says, “Yeah, Republicans!” or “Yeah, Donald Trump!” or “Yeah, Proud Boys!” or “Yeah, Identity Evropa!” or even “Yeah, White Supremacy!” And Harvard agrees. Harvard does not punish the political speech of its students, no matter how odious it might be. My argument is that Williams should have the same policy.

The *Crimson*, and my critics, spent scores of hours going through EphBlog. These were the best (worst?) two examples they could come up with, out of literally hundreds of thousands of words of commentary. I reported the consensus of the scholarly literature. I supported Harvard’s current policy. For those sins, I must be unpersoned. The *Crimson* editorial continues:

Damning still, in his response to the controversy, Kane has repeatedly failed to claim that he did not author the posts in question, or to condemn their content

despite issuing multiple statements on the subject to students enrolled in his course. ...

Why “condemn” content which accurately summarizes Harvard’s own court testimony or argues in favor of Harvard’s current policy? Regardless, I have never discussed these topics --- or anything else controversial --- in my courses because my job is to teach statistics. For the Crimson, however, my political opinions, even written pseudonymously on a site with no Harvard connection, are a firing offense. Does it matter that I, for example, voted for, and donated¹ money to, Barack Obama? No. Does it matter that scores of BIPOC students have thrived in my classes? No. Does it matter that my own wife and children are BIPOC? No. The Crimson wanted to hunt witches and hunt me it did.

I closed EphBlog, and have avoided any public discussion of my views, because I am a teacher first. Anything which detracts from my teaching duties is a luxury I can live without. I have not changed my opinions, nor would I ever denounce them. Indeed, students often seek me out during office hours to discuss them. My (naive?) position is that privately-held *political* beliefs should be no more relevant to Harvard’s appointment process than privately-held *religious* beliefs.

Harvard, to its credit, ignored the Crimson’s demand last fall. Sadly, despite support from the Government Department, my one-year contract was not renewed, as it was the previous two years and as it almost always is for preceptors. I was cancelled. I am the first Harvard faculty member to lose his job because of his political views in decades. Unless things change, I won’t be the last.

References

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¹ <https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup/results?name=David+Kane&zip=02458>