Which is more important, protecting free speech given by the First Amendment or fixing the pain and negativity caused by hate speech? Seeing how much of a “hot topic” hate speech is becoming nowadays and that people are willing to sacrifice their right to free speech to resolve it, means that both are equally important in today’s world. Just as problems in relationships are caused by problems within the individual, the problems in society are caused by something deeper. Problems like littering in big cities can be resolved most effectively not by enforcing the strictest littering fines, but by educating people and raising awareness of the importance of taking care of the environment. The same goes for the issue of hate speech. It is good that more and more people are becoming aware that this is not the correct way to treat the people around you who attend the same schools, live in the same neighborhoods, and are citizens of the same country. However, we cannot expect such a deep and complex problem to be thoroughly resolved with a simple, surface-level solution as passing laws limiting specific types of speech. We cannot deny that hate speech is a problem on college campuses today seeing that many people are hurt and impacted by it, but banning it does not solve the deeper problems that it represents because instead of relying on the government or school administration to fix such a complex societal problem, we are the ones who are responsible to educate and support those around us in order to create a culture of loving and respecting others.

Hate speech is most definitely a real issue today, but it also must be acknowledged that possible implemented solutions can also indirectly create more issues as well, especially in learning. Many will argue that limiting freedom of speech on school campuses will also limit the free flow of various ideas and perspectives on campus. Professors are unarguably the biggest source of new knowledge and ideas for students. Based on this, I believe that free speech limiting hate speech laws will affect professors on campus far more than the students themselves which will limit the scope of a student’s education at a university. Dolfman, a part-time lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania was “banished” from the university for one year, forced to make a public apology, and forced to attend a “sensitivity and racial awareness session.” (Hentoff 382-383) The reason was because he tried to teach black students in his class the importance of knowing the thirteenth amendment and referred to them as “ex-slaves”. “I wanted them to really think about it and know its history. You’re better equipped to fight racism if you know all about those post-Civil War amendments and civil-rights laws.” (Hentoff 382) Right before calling the black students “ex-slaves,” “he told them that he and other Jews, as ex-slaves, spoke at Passover of the time when they were slaves under the Pharaohs so that they would remember every year what it was like not to be free.” (Hentoff 382) Dolfman had the right intention when speaking to the black students in that way and anyone has the right to disagree with it, but it was not just for him to suffer these serious consequences over a misunderstanding by his students. Although the situation was not completely explained, the black students in the class could have reported Dolfman to the school administration not only because they were offended but possibly because they originally disliked Dolfman and wanted to take advantage of the school’s rules to bring misfortune upon him. Dolfman is just one example of professors who are very passionate about teaching students the significance and meaning behind the material learned in class. If free speech limiting laws are created with even more serious consequences than Dolfman’s case like jailtime or arrest, Professors’ teaching may suffer because they are too afraid of accidently breaking a speech law. “A graduate student teacher challenged the University of Michigan’s rules, arguing they were so broad that they forced him to remove parts of his lecture material for fear of offending some unknown members of his class.” (Tuman 385) In contrast to common belief that speech limiting laws need to be implemented to combat hate speech, it can be seen that such means will actually create more problems and open the way to more misunderstandings and even possible corruption.

Before we can push for the implementation of new speech laws on our campuses, we first must be aware of current laws in place for speech. Compared to what one may think, the issue of hate speech and free speech is not a new issue and has already been debated in court numerous times leading to free speech granted by the First Amendment having limits implemented. “The Supreme Court has held that words which ‘by their very utterance inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace’ are not protected by the First Amendment.” (Lawrence 375) This exception that was added to the First Amendment is defined as “fighting words”. This is such an important right and protection granted by the U.S. Constitution. Anyone has the right to their own opinion about another person or group, but more important than that is the right to safety of every citizen. Anyone can have their own opinion and express it to you or another person, but the moment that opinion crosses the line of inciting violence that is punishable as a crime. Unfortunately not everyone views all people as equal, but thanks to the exception of the First Amendment we do not have to live worrying about our safety. It is our responsibility to recognize “fighting words” and to stand up for our rights. Going back to Dolfman, it is ironic that he was “banished” from the university because he seemed like a very strong advocate for this: “We will lose our liberties if we don’t know what they are.” (Hentoff 382) A person cannot be punished for a crime they have committed if it isn’t reported. A crime cannot be reported if the victim is not aware of their rights and what specifically constitutes as a crime. All citizens of the U.S.A. must be clearly informed of current speech laws and the revisions already made over history before we pursue new speech laws that may not even be needed in the first place.

The issue of hate speech on campus will not be resolved merely through the means of implementing new speech rules, but it will be resolved through a change of people’s hearts and a united effort. Of all institutions, I believe that universities are the place that need the least amount of restrictions of speech. Students being from 18 to 30+ years old are actually the most capable of bringing a change to our society. It would be a waste of young people’s enthusiasm and spirit to just address the problem of hate speech through the passing of new hate speech rules by the university. University of Wisconsin political science professor Carol Tebben stated that university administrators “are getting confused when they are acting as censors and trying to protect students from bad ideas. I don’t think students need to be protected from bad ideas. I think they can determine for themselves what ideas are bad.” (Hentoff 379) As adults, students have already developed a sense of identity and a grasp of their own personal values. The university trying to “protect” students from hate speech shows their lack of faith in the students’ ability. Students are capable of working out problems among themselves and incidents of hate speech, if approached properly, may even lead to resolution. On the other hand, if we don’t leave open the opportunity for students to be vocal with their beliefs and opinions (even ones that go against common belief) there is no way for and open dialogue to form for common understanding and progress. Sheldon Steinbach, general counsel for the American Council on Education said: “If you’re fearful that somehow you will misspeak, you wind up avoiding the very people you need to get to know.” (Wildavsky 385) The university may just be the place for the students that are the most “racist” to be finally opened up to a new perspective through open discussion and respectful communication. The issue of hate speech on campuses can be resolved through students working together.

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