



January 15, 2025

Via USPS First Class mail to  
President P. Barry Butler, Ph.D.  
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University  
1 Aerospace Boulevard  
Daytona Beach, FL 32114-3900

And via email to  
Chantal Criswell  
Senior Executive Assistant to the President  
[Chantal.Criswell@erau.edu](mailto:Chantal.Criswell@erau.edu)

Re: Campus Speech Ban punishing Young Americans for Freedom (YAF)

Dear President Butler:

I am writing this letter to bring to your attention your university's shameful, ill-conceived policy banning nearly every semblance of free speech on your campuses. My earnest hope is that in reading this letter and reconsidering your speech ban, you might restore your university's reputation for fairmindedness and academic integrity. Moreover, repealing your speech ban may also help Embry-Riddle avoid an outpouring of just criticism and ridicule that will surely follow if your school should persist in its authoritarian, repugnant policy that willfully exterminates the free marketplace of ideas that is essential to every university's mission and success.

Because Embry-Riddle has a long, distinguished history of supporting and advancing scientific inquiry—a concept unable to proceed and prosper in the absence of free speech—I must conclude you are receiving poor counsel from key advisors who believe they are serving you well by attempting to steer your university away from any and all campus controversies. While naturally I am not privy to your internal deliberations, I have reason to believe your policy reeks of the noxious influence of your school's Director of Diversity and Inclusion (a pernicious position that undercuts the very concept of merit that lies at the heart of all science) and subsequently reviewed by other pusillanimous senior staff. Regardless of who conceived your school's speech ban, it is an abomination and unworthy of any eminent and acclaimed university.

The facts are these: late last semester Embry-Riddle adopted a speech ban that prohibits "any outdoor events and demonstrations" "related to religious and political causes."<sup>1</sup> The ban prohibits activism at both the Arizona and Florida campuses. One student activist, deeply

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<sup>1</sup> October 23, 2024 email "Updated Guidance Regarding Campus Events and Demonstrations."

concerned by the ban, sought more information from university officials, including Chancellor Dr. Ken Witcher. These officials refused to discuss the matter in writing but personally informed the student that activism would be permitted only behind closed doors with security present. This was, according to the officials, “the spirit of the policy [ban].”

This disgraceful speech ban overtly violates your own Campus Expression Policy which expressly adopts First Amendment standards and acknowledges the constitutional rights of students: “Freedom of expression and assembly are rights of all citizens, residents, and sojourners in the United States of America.”<sup>2</sup>

Like every other university following the advice of “woke” administrators, any such speech ban inevitably is employed to silence one side: conservatives. And the facts I present to you now suggest the speech ban adopted last semester began with a very clear purpose in mind—to silence the student members of YAF.

In just the past few months, Embry-Riddle has blocked the following YAF student initiatives on the Prescott campus alone:

- A “Stand with Israel” display consisting of Israeli flags showing support for the state of Israel, Jewish students everywhere, and opponents of terrorism
- A “9/11: Never Forget” memorial
- A “Biology Basics activism project” intended to counter the lie at the heart of transgenderism
- Handing out flyers to promote a speech by truth-teller and transgender surgery opponent Chloe Cole
- A “Funeral for Halloween” activism project lampooning “politically correct” restrictions on costumes that commit “cultural appropriation”
- The YAF chapter’s goal of bring Chloe Cole to campus to present her views to those Embry-Riddle students who might wish to learn from what she has to say
- A “Where Does Life Begin?” project showing the various stages of fetal development to expose students to the reality of life in the womb

Seven times in the past few months Embry-Riddle has denied YAF students the opportunity to express themselves peacefully and reasonably. Yet your school quickly approved a pro-transgender activism project on the “Day of Trans Visibility.” It is obvious to any sentient being that Embry-Riddle is employing the same reprehensible double-standard that has prevailed at once revered schools such as Harvard, Columbia, MIT, and Penn.

If the discrimination against the Prescott campus YAF chapter did not prove this ban is targeted against conservative speech, what happened to the Daytona Beach YAF chapter is the final nail in Embry-Riddle’s coffin.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://daytonabeach.erau.edu/campus-life/dean-of-students/honor/university-policies#:~:text=Freedom%20of%20expression%20and%20assembly,University's%20well%2Dbeing%20and%20reputation.>

Last fall, the Daytona Beach YAF chapter partnered with the campus Hillel group and a Muslim student group to conduct activism in honor of the lives lost in the October 7<sup>th</sup> massacre. Embry-Riddle refused to even consider a flag display, but did agree to an outdoor candle display. Embry-Riddle insisted, however, that the display be focused on all lives lost to terrorism at any point – completely destroying the meaning of the display. The students were further banned from referencing Israel or Hamas in any way. What reason could you have for watering down this pro-Israel display other than complete cowardice?

But even this meaningless, universalist candle display was too much for you. Embry-Riddle further ordered the students that the display could happen only behind closed doors with campus security guarding the room, where no one would see it. As one student said, “what’s the point?”

The point was clear: to ban pro-Israel students’ voices. Embry-Riddle finalized this bigotry by enacting the full speech ban the day before the display was to take place.

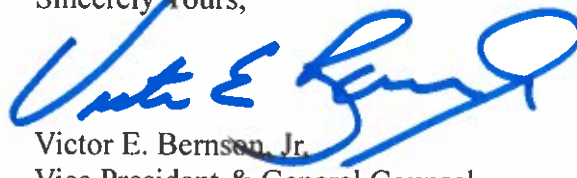
President Butler, you need not follow in the same footsteps as the disgraced leaders of these four schools. You possess full authority to repeal the speech ban and restore Embry-Riddle’s sense of honor and decency. Or you could continue to follow the poor counsel you’ve received and leave the speech ban in place. Perhaps your advisors are telling you that as a private school, you can set whatever speech policy you want. And to some extent, that may be true. But your current speech ban dishonors Embry-Riddle’s legacy, including the commitment to free speech that helped motivate the many brilliant men and women who used the special knowledge they acquired at your university to help our nation prevail in the wars that rescued our world from certain tyranny.

Similarly, you might receive advice that you could defend against any breach of contract claim brought by one of your students who believes the ban is entirely inconsistent with your own free speech promises. But even if a defense were successful, you cannot avoid the court of public opinion. YAF is not without influence and friends, and if you persist with your shameful, ill-conceived policy, YAF’s many friends across the nation will take notice of the disreputable actions you’ve taken, and the lack of democratic values Embry-Riddle now embraces. You can be certain YAF will share this letter with friends in the new Presidential administration; in the Florida Governor’s office; in the Florida and Arizona legislatures; in the national, state, and local media; and with other key public opinion influencers with massive followings on social media or who run popular podcasts.

The choice is entirely yours. I pray you do the right thing and repeal the speech ban.

I look forward to your prompt and thoughtful reply, and I look forward to Embry-Riddle allowing the YAF students on your campuses to voice their conservative viewpoints going forward.

Sincerely Yours,



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