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Uncomfortable learning

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Photo @mleemc via Instagram

An interesting controversy about the nature of learning is taking place at one of America's great liberal arts colleges. A recent art installation at Wellesley College includes the sculpture by artist Tony Matelli of a man in briefs. The **story** has been covered widely and has generated a **controversy** on campus about the nature of art and learning.

The controversy is how to balance learning and student feelings. Many students on campus have **expressed unease, discomfort and even fear**. Yet learning at its best is often uncomfortable. Education is all about exposing students to new ideas, experiences and ways of looking at the world. It is naturally uncomfortable to talk about religion, politics, culture and art with others who have different views or simply to have your own world view challenged.

Certainly faculty and educational institutions must be sensitive to students' views and needs. If a situation is so painful or threatening that the student shuts down and refuses to participate, then no learning takes place. But students also have a responsibility to recognize that learning is often uncomfortable and even painful. An education that is never uncomfortable is no education at all.

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Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).