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Ending commencement season on a positive note

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Ending Commencement Season on a Positive Note



Stephanie Mitchell/Harvard Staff Photographer

Former New York Mayor and businessman Michael Bloomberg gave a **commencement speech** at Harvard recently that took aim at the politicization of commencements. **He said**, “This spring, it has been disturbing to see a number of college commencement speakers withdraw—or have their invitations rescinded—after protests from students and—to me, shockingly—from senior faculty and administrators who should know better.”

In his speech he also noted the importance of diverse views and ideas on our college campuses:

There is an idea floating around college campuses—including here at Harvard—that scholars should be funded only if their work conforms to a particular view of justice. There’s a word for that idea: censorship. And it is just a modern-day form of McCarthyism.

Think about the irony: In the 1950s, the right wing was attempting to repress left wing ideas. Today, on many college campuses, it is liberals trying to repress conservative ideas, even as conservative faculty members are at risk of becoming an endangered species. And perhaps nowhere is that more true than here in the Ivy League.

In the 2012 presidential race, according to Federal Election Commission data, 96% of all campaign contributions from Ivy League faculty and employees went to Barack Obama. Ninety-six percent. There was more disagreement among the old Soviet Politburo than there is among Ivy League donors.

It is fitting to end the 2014 commencement season with this apt description of the mission of higher education offered by Bloomberg:

A university’s obligation is not to teach students what to think but to teach students how to think. That requires listening to the other side, weighing arguments without prejudice.

At the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University that might succinctly be described as “listening with the ear of the heart.” — Saint Benedict, 6th Century.

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | June 5th, 2014 | Categories: [Higher Education](#) | [0 Comments](#)

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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](#).