

In Case You Wondered if There's Really an Agenda to Silence Conservative Views

A day after Liberty University President Jerry Falwell Jr. praised the student body during Saturday's commencement for giving a warm welcome to diverse speakers invited to campus this year, the *Wall Street Journal* published an opinion piece from a Harvard University professor about the limited debate and rising opposition to free speech occurring on college campuses.

In her article, "The Closing of the Collegiate Mind," Ruth R. Wisse, Martin Peretz Professor of Yiddish Literature and professor of comparative literature at Harvard, writes about the recent assault on intellectual and political freedom and the lack of support from universities in these realms.

"Universities have not only failed to stand up to those who limit debate, they have played a part in encouraging them," she wrote. "The modish commitment to so-called diversity replaces the ideal of guaranteed equal treatment of individuals with guaranteed group preferences in hiring and curricular offerings."

Johnnie Moore, Liberty's senior vice president for communications, says the article echoes the comments made at commencement by both the keynote speaker, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, and Falwell.

"When I read Professor Wisse's piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, I wondered if she had attended commencement at Liberty University," Moore says. "Her remarks mirrored almost exactly the remarks of President Falwell and Gov. Jindal. Except, of course, she was speaking from America's oldest university, Harvard."

Moore praises Wisse's condemnation of liberal bias in the academy.

"Professor Wisse did a very courageous thing in daring to highlight the close-mindedness of those who often pride themselves on their tolerance of contrarian views," he says. "The truth is that Wisse might be a more welcome voice on this campus than her own."

In his commencement address, Falwell said Liberty's warm reception of speakers this year, who ranged from U.S. Sen. Mark Warner and Pattie Mallette (mother of Justin Bieber) to television and radio host Glenn Beck and Gov. Jindal, "is in stark contrast to the reception that speakers often receive at major secular universities—universities that constantly pat themselves on the back for their commitment to diversity and inclusiveness."

Like Wisse, Falwell also referred to former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who declined her invitation to speak at Rutgers University's commencement this year because of student protests.

On Saturday, Falwell told the crowd that while Liberty is a Christian university, it has always invited prominent speakers "from all religious and political persuasions and from all walks of life" to speak.

"We believe that you, our graduates, will be better equipped to defend your faith and your values because you have heard firsthand from leaders who have different theological and political beliefs," Falwell said.

One reason Liberty students have responded well to diverse guest speakers, he continued, is that the Liberty community, and conservative Christians in general, "are more respectful and more willing to listen to those who have different viewpoints because they are confident in what they believe."

"You see, if you fervently believe something and have confidence in your faith and your worldview, you don't feel threatened by contrary opinions," Falwell told the crowd. "On the other hand, if you are insecure in your beliefs or you don't really believe what you claim to believe, you are more likely to fear the expression of opposing views."