

# Lynn Schmidt: Dragged kicking and screaming into the culture wars

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For those of you who think the culture wars do not affect regular people, I am here to tell you they do.

I am a self-professed “culture war pacifist,” but it is episodes like the one I’ll describe below that push me into thinking the left has gone too far and the right might have a point.

I am currently attending graduate school as a remote student and take 100% of my classes online. Recently I received an email telling me that a requirement of graduation is mandatory bystander training. “Every student attending [university’s name] is required to attend an in-person, peer-informed training by the end of the semester. The training will prepare students to effectively respond to dangerous situations to help keep campus safe.”



Lynn Schmidt

I immediately emailed a person at the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center who was in charge of the program and requested a deferment. My reasons for deferment included that I live several states away, I attend remotely, I am an older, nontraditional student, and as a former nurse who worked in a children’s hospital, I was already a mandatory reporter. I quickly received a response stating I was required to take this training, and it was being offered over Zoom.



Do you think “wokeness” is good or bad? Veuer’s Tony Spitz has the details.

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No discussion. No exceptions. If I wanted to graduate, I needed to attend the training.

The bystander training consisted of a lecture of sorts on interpersonal violence and steps bystanders can take to prevent it. The center described the training as this: “Intervention starts with understanding interpersonal violence. This handout will discuss how to recognize warning signs, identify effective intervention techniques, process barriers to intervention, and connect students with interpersonal violence resources. Students will evaluate their role at the university as potential bystanders and learn how to create safer spaces within their community.”



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Online students were to sign up for the Zoom course. Unlike other modules I have taken before, this was a live event on Zoom. Students were required to remain on Zoom the entire time, which was just shy of two hours. If we logged out of Zoom before the training was over, we would not receive our certificate. After the lecture portion, we were shown videos of fellow students engaged in social situations. Students were then assigned breakout rooms to discuss intervention tactics.

Let me be clear about the scenarios presented: None of them included someone being actively abused. Not one of them presented children being abused by an adult. None showed anyone breaking a law. They were softer, requiring a personal judgment. The situations could have led to potential interpersonal violence but that is not what was pictured in the module.

Here was one scenario. While at a party, you notice Susie

drinking heavily and talking to John. A few minutes later, John invites Susie upstairs. The video stops, and Zoom participants were instructed to discuss ways to stop whatever might happen from happening. The clincher was that we were truly bystanders who did not know Susie or John. Another sketch had accused Ken of cyberstalking Brian because Ken was following Brian’s social media posts “too carefully.” We were asked what we could do to encourage Ken to shut down his behavior.

Laying out his top priorities for a second term and a potential platform for a presidential run, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis delivered a State of the State speech that signaled another round of cultural wars.

All I want to do is pay my tuition, learn from my classes, study hard and graduate with a master’s degree. Now I was forced to spend 120 minutes of my time listening to someone else’s social agenda — with my degree being held hostage.

I’m not sure which was worse for me: that I was being forced to spend my free time sitting on Zoom discussing scenarios that I will never experience, or that there was no consideration of personal responsibility during any of it.

I consider myself a pro-democracy conservative very concerned about the authoritarian-populist right. Many of the right’s anti-woke acts frankly scare me. That said, I can appreciate their attempts to slow down the progressive, groupthink ideology found in many institutions of higher education.

Universities and colleges employ experts on subject matter, and they teach the next generation skill sets. They historically have encouraged free thought and critical thinking. This training not only tried to tell me how to think but also how to act.

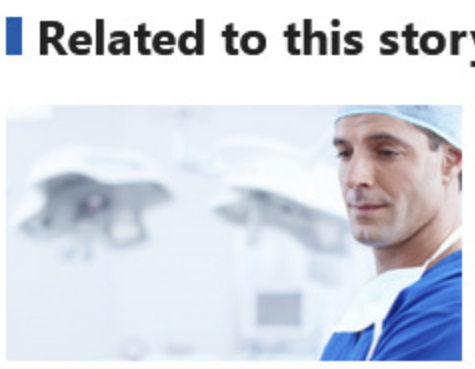
An old saying is that you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink. In this context, I would change it to say you can require a student to Zoom, but you can’t make her think.

I look forward to tapping out of the culture wars again.

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