Protests lead to cancellation of alt-right speaking event at UC Davis

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Last Friday, protests led to the cancellation of a speaking event by alt-right Breitbart News editor Milo Yiannopoulos at the University of California, Davis. The event, hosted by the Davis College Republicans (DCR), was also set to feature Martin Shkreli, the former CEO of Turing Pharmaceuticals notorious for the September 2015 price hike of Daraprim, a medication used to treat conditions associated with HIV.

Police set up barricades outside the Science Lecture Hall, the venue for the event, while roughly 150 protesters gathered. Police arrested one person inside the venue on suspicion of obstructing a police officer, but none were arrested from the group protesting outside the event, which remained peaceful, according to UC Davis spokeswoman Kimberly Hale. Protesters chanted, "Say it loud, say it clear, racists are not welcome here!"

After meeting with campus police and UC Davis Student Affairs officials, DCR leaders decided to cancel the event. Hale told *The Sacramento Bee* that the university did not in fact order the shutdown of the event, but rather presented DCR with their concerns about attendees' safety.

Hale told the *Bee*, "They [the College Republicans] were presented with the details of what was happening around the venue that evening. Protesters were blocking the entrance, so to be able to get the ticketed persons inside the venue, that would have been difficult."

Interim UC Davis Chancellor Ralph Hexter told KCRA News Saturday that he was "deeply disappointed" by the protest, saying, "Our community is founded on principles of respect for all views, even those that we personally find repellent."

Following the event's cancellation, Yiannopoulos and Shkreli took to social media to malign the protesters and campus administration, and to incite their right-wing audience. Even though the university did not itself cancel the event, Yiannopoulos wrote on Facebook, "Left-wing thugs scared UC Davis into canceling my event last night by damaging property, hurling excrement at guests and starting fights. […] Come join us at 1pm today in the quad at UC Davis to protest the university's pathetic failure to protect free speech."

In fact, the university has said that no property damage was reported due to the protests.

At campus Saturday, Yiannopoulos reportedly stood on a picnic table with a loudspeaker and denounced the university for canceling the event, and then led a march of protesters through part of the campus, chanting, "USA! USA!" A group of counter-protesters simultaneously denounced him, shouting, "No Milo, No KKK, No Fascist U.S.A."

Provocatively titled "The Dangerous Faggot Tour," Yiannopoulos (who is gay) has spoken at numerous campuses across the US and is slated to speak at other campuses on the West Coast in the coming weeks, including Washington State University on January 19, the University of Washington on January 20, UC Berkeley on February 1, and UCLA on February 2, among other campuses.

Yiannopoulos, like most of the alt-right and ultra-conservative media, has strongly supported Trump since he first launched his presidential campaign. As editor of Breitbart News, Yiannopoulos has a close connection to Stephen Bannon, the executive chair of Breitbart News, Trump's campaign manager and now his chief strategist in the White House.

Yiannopoulos gained notoriety last July after he was banned from Twitter for directing a series of racist and sexist tweets toward comedian Leslie Jones.

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At UC Berkeley, hundreds of letters have been sent to the administration from faculty, students and others demanding the cancellation of Yiannopoulos' February 1 event. One letter from a dozen faculty members argued that his talks include "harassment, slander, defamation, and hate speech," all of which violate UC Berkeley's code of conduct.

Associate chancellor Nils Gilman told the *LA Times* that administration plans to go forward with the scheduled talk, arguing, "It is not just a responsibility but really an operational necessity that we maintain an environment where free expression of ideas can take place."

Gilman told the *Times* that university officials will serve as "referees trying to maintain a level playing field" by demanding that groups such as the College Republicans pay for the increased security necessary to police their events.

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