

Letter from the Safe Community Team to
Bruce Lesnick and Carol Dansereau

4 June 2024

Dear Bruce and Carol,

As you know, the Eliot Board received a number of complaints regarding your behavior during and after August Eliot 2023. Based on the information received, the Executive Committee of the Board determined that the alleged concerns implicated substantial individual and community safety, and therefore called for the formation of a Safe Community Team (SCT) pursuant to our Restoring Right Relations Policy.

The role of the SCT is to evaluate the allegations and to determine an appropriate response.

The SCT invited the two of you to hear the concerns that had been raised and to respond to them; we then met on May 15.

The concerns raised, and your responses, are:

1. Concern: You both spoke directly to people and in a way where your words were overheard by others where you expressed your beliefs that there are only two genders and that gender continuum does not exist. These words were hurtful to these campers and led them to feel that Eliot was not a safe place for queer & trans/LGBTQ+ people.
 1. You responded that you have a right to express your views, even controversial views, and that this is consistent with the Eliot Covenant's calling us to consider the diverse perspectives and experiences that individuals bring to Eliot and listen deeply to appreciate other people's needs and points of view.
 2. You said you have always shared your views in a respectful manner, have not compelled anyone to have a conversation with you that they didn't want to have, and have not insisted that others adopt your views, and that you would continue to abide by all of these norms of respectful conversation.
 3. You expressed the view that "gender ideology" (the belief that gender is something other than the identity that corresponds to one's anatomy at

birth) poses a grave harm to the rights of women, gay and lesbians, and children's health. You shared that you speak out on this issue out of a sense of duty to inform about this harm and reduce it.

4. You expressed the view that, when the Eliot community frames your expression of dissenting views as making others unsafe, that we are moving down a dangerous path of censorship and toward fragilization and authoritarianism: fragilization - because it assumes that some members of the community can't tolerate opposing viewpoints, and authoritarianism because it weaponizes that fragility in order to exclude those who express dissenting views.
 5. You requested that the Eliot Board repeal the Sex and Gender Diversity Policy and Statement.
2. Concern: Bruce used a pronoun for the speaker which is not the pronoun the speaker uses, even after reminders.
 1. You responded that you do not want to refer to or about people with pronouns you believe to be incorrect for them, and that you do not believe you should be compelled to do so, as you believe that this is "dishonest." You said that you would be willing to use the person's first name rather than any pronoun. *You asked for grace if you make a mistake.*
 3. Concern: You both wore t-shirts with a message which the reporter said was related to who uses which bathrooms and which they experienced as an anti-trans message.
 1. Your response to this was that you did not have any t-shirts related to bathroom use, but that you did have t-shirts with dictionary definitions of "man" and "woman."
 4. Concern: You sent emails to campers which were unsolicited and contained information the campers did not want to receive, including links to a video which many described as harmful and transphobic, which some recipients described as upsetting to them.
 1. You acknowledged that you sent emails with resources you thought would be of interest or helpful to others, and that you had received a few responses, but not many.

After reviewing all of the information made available to us, including your responses to us in our meeting as well as in your written follow up to the meeting, the SCT has made the following findings and decision.

We find:

That other campers have been hurt by your behaviors and the words you have expressed.

That suggesting that a particular group of people (gender diverse individuals) are wrong about who they understand themselves to be does not fully respect the worth and dignity of these individuals and may legitimately be considered harmful, both to the gender diverse individuals themselves and to the community at large.

We are called by the Eliot Covenant to consider the diverse perspectives and experiences that individuals bring to Eliot and to listen deeply to appreciate other people's needs and points of view. We agree that it is important to be able to discuss questions of gender and justice, questions that touch the lives of some members of our community very deeply and personally. We wish to foster a climate that supports disagreement and debate on this and other issues. We do not believe that respectful dialogue can occur between two people when one's starting point is to invalidate the expressed identity of the other.

Our expectations listed below are grounded both in our recognition that denying the experience of marginalized members of our community does harm, and our interest in creating conditions that support respectful disagreement about sensitive topics.

Fundamentally, the Eliot Covenant is a set of agreements we have made about how we will interact with one another, independent of the content of a given conversation. We may indeed disagree with one another, and we still can engage in respectful dialogue. We may also decline to engage in a given conversation. At all times when we engage, however, we are called to engage with kindness, make every effort to avoid harming one another, and repair promptly when we do.

Accordingly, it is the decision of the Safe Community Team, in consultation with the Eliot Board, that:

You are welcome to attend camp and participate in Eliot activities provided you enter into a written agreement with the Safe Community Team regarding specific behavioral expectations for your participation, including all of the following:

1. You affirm your intent to abide by the Eliot Covenant and all other policies including the Sex and Gender Identity Policy and Respectful Behavior Expectations policy.
2. You use the name and pronouns that each person requests for themselves, both when talking to that person and when referring to that person when speaking with others. You will not use a name or pronoun that is different from what that person uses for themselves.
3. You openly acknowledge that it is the right of each person to define who they are.
4. You ensure that the people with whom you are sharing your theory of gender ideology and its dangers are consenting to be in such conversation with you:
 1. You may introduce the topic, followed promptly by asking if the other person is open to talking about it with you; if they decline, you respect that boundary and do not pursue the conversation, which will end immediately if any person expresses that they are done with the conversation.
 2. You move out of earshot of others who have not explicitly consented to engaging in the conversation.
 3. The conversation is a respectful dialogue, meaning that you make space to hear each other's ideas.
5. In any instance where your behavior has harmed another person and/or the community as a whole, you will resolve these conflicts and repair relationships constructively and in a direct and caring manner. This means that if someone says they are harmed by your words or behavior, you do not argue that the person is not harmed, but instead listen carefully, account for your behavior, and engage collaboratively with that person to repair relationships and move forward in a healthy way, ask what the person needs for repair, and then you do better the next time.

If these terms are acceptable to you, we request that you sign below acknowledging your willingness to conduct yourself in accordance with the boundaries set forth above.

If you are not able to so agree, we regret that you will not be welcome to join us at camp or Eliot-related activities unless and until you are able to conform to these behavioral expectations.

If you do agree and sign, and then later you do not adhere to these expectations, you may be asked to leave camp immediately or otherwise cease participation in Eliot activities.

I understand the expectations set forth by the Eliot Safe Community Team and I agree to adhere to them.

Bruce Lesnick

Carol Dansereau

Date signed

Date signed