

**Werner, Opulauoho and Jiang: At this year's Commencement,  
Dartmouth will honor a man who helped Megyn Kelly smear trans people.**

*Transgender members of the Dartmouth community don't have the luxury of overlooking Greg Lukianoff's history of vilifying us. The rest of Dartmouth shouldn't overlook it either.*

By Kelii Opulauoho , Jiachen Jiang and Valen Werner Published May 19, 2026

In September, Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression president Greg Lukianoff went on the Megyn Kelly show to accuse transgender rights advocates of intimidating their opponents into silence. Over a period of 30 minutes, Lukianoff alternated between nodding solemnly along with Kelly's anti-trans rants and chiming in to remind the audience that, under the Constitution, you cannot be compelled to "call [a trans person] by a name that you don't believe is theirs." He also claimed that transgender people expecting others to use their names and pronouns is "totalitarian," that transgender rights have only ever gained support because "people were just terrified of the trans rights activists," and that formerly terrified people are now "waking up" from their previous support of trans rights. Throughout the show, Kelly promotes her sponsors: a gold company, a matcha tea company and an online pharmacy that offers ivermectin and hydroxychloroquine, controversial medications pushed by right wing influencers as a cure for COVID-19. Participating in this farce, in itself, we would call dishonorable. But even the trans-bashing apparently does not disqualify Lukianoff from what Dartmouth calls "the College's highest distinction": receiving an honorary degree.

The interview with Megyn Kelly is emblematic of Lukianoff's animus against transgender people, but it's far from the only example. He recently posted on X that, "In [his] career defending academic freedom and free speech, [he] never saw anything become as immediately radioactive as views that ran counter to the narrative on trans issues ... And usually, that is a sign that the true believers know, at some level, that they are on shaky ground." This isn't merely a case of a man who is behind the times but ultimately harmless: Lukianoff and FIRE have done real harm to the transgender community by maligning us as anti-free speech aggressors. FIRE's online guide to pronouns focuses entirely on their position that misgendering cannot legally constitute harassment; even if one agrees with this position, one must admit it is strange that FIRE never once mentions the right of trans people to assert their own gender identity. Recently, FIRE filed an amicus brief in the case of *Defending Education v. Olentangy*, supporting the anti-trans group *Defending Education's* argument that it is unconstitutional for a school district to prohibit misgendering in its anti-bullying policy. In FIRE's world, after all, trans people aren't at a higher risk of being bullied into silence — let alone suicide or murder, whose victims famously cannot speak. No, in FIRE's world, trans people are the bullies.

The logical conclusion of this line of thinking is that those who promote the existence of transgender people — including, by definition, all transgender people — are threats to democracy. The Trump administration has run with this narrative. A few days ago, the government released a counterterrorism strategy that prioritizes combating transgender rights groups. In a call with reporters, senior director for counterterrorism Sebastian Gorka vowed to "crush ... the transgender killers" and "the non-binary," to "[neutralize]" the "radically pro-gender" groups he dubiously characterizes as "violent." How ironic is it, then, that people like Lukianoff continue to insist that trans people threaten free speech when the United States government, on the basis of our speech, is threatening our lives?

As representatives of Dartmouth's LGBTQIA+ Alumni Association, we believe Dartmouth should have disqualified Lukianoff from consideration for an honorary degree on the basis that he has repeatedly abused his power to discredit transgender voices — threatening the free speech he claims to defend. This, in our assessment, does not make him a very good “[role model] for the graduating class and the greater Dartmouth community” — one of the College's supposed “guidelines” for honorary degree nominations. But in this political climate, we have sadly observed that Dartmouth is not prioritizing the wellbeing of one of the Republican party's favorite scapegoats. So instead, this responsibility falls to the community. We encourage Commencement attendees who believe in transgender people's dignity to turn their backs as Lukianoff receives his honorary degree. This is a symbolic action. The majority of people, we expect, will not do it. But if you're not trans yourself, you have a friend, an acquaintance, a colleague, a classmate who is, whether you know it or not. They will know you defended them, and that's worth something. And if you are trans, you will know you defended yourself, and that's worth a lot.

Signed,

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<https://www.thedartmouth.com/article/2026/05/at-this-years-commencement-dartmouth-will-honor-a-man-who-helped-megyn-kelly-smear-trans-people>