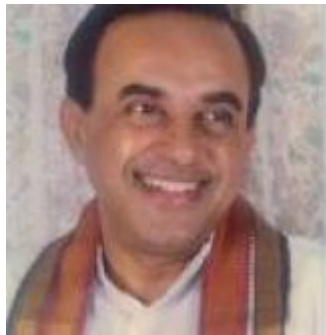


Non-economists at Harvard don't like my views on how to protect India - Swamy



Over the Line

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By

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In an unusual move, Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences voted this week to eliminate two summer school courses in economics because of anti-Muslim statements the instructor made in an op-ed published in India.

When word about the op-ed spread in July, some Harvard students demanded that Subramanian Swamy be fired. At the time, Harvard pledged to look into the situation, but noted that it is "central to the mission of a university to protect free speech, including that of Dr. Swamy and of those who disagree with him." But faculty members this week cited the nature of his statements as justifying the move to kill his courses rather than permit him to return to Cambridge.

The op-ed ran in Daily News & Analysis (and while that newspaper no longer has the piece online, it can be read [here](#)). The piece, a response to a bombing by Muslim terrorists in Mumbai, said that India could wipe out terrorism by taking certain steps, such as declaring India a Hindu state where "non-Hindus can vote only if they proudly acknowledge that their ancestors were Hindus," or demolishing mosques, or banning conversion from Hinduism to any other faith. Swamy was once an economics professor at Harvard, but he returned to his home in India, where is an outspoken nationalistic politician. But he has come back to Harvard each year to teach in the summer school.

The faculty vote on Swamy's courses came during what is typically a routine review (and approval) of the slate of summer school offerings. In this case, the faculty approved the courses only after removing the two Swamy was to have taught.

Harvard faculty meetings are closed to the press except for representatives of Harvard Magazine (the alumni publication) and The Harvard Crimson (the student newspaper). An account of the meeting in Harvard Magazine said that the economics department chair, John Y. Campbell, told the faculty that his economics colleagues considered Swamy to be "competent" to teach the courses, and that none of the students who took his courses last summer had complained about him. The only student who mentioned the op-ed in a class evaluation rated the course favorably. The department had "expressed its view that it would not take a collective position on academic freedom or on matters of speech, hate speech, or Harvard's reputation -- issues on which there were a wide range of views, in this case, within the department," Campbell was quoted as saying.

The proposal that eventually carried -- to decline to authorize Swamy's courses -- was made by Diana L. Eck, a scholar of India's religions. According to the Harvard Magazine account, she stressed that this was much more than an issue of a professor having some controversial views. She called Swamy's views "destructive" and said that his ideas involved limiting the human rights of others and denying freedom of

religion. In light of the nature of his comments, she also wondered why his courses hadn't been "quietly dropped," rather than included in the proposed offerings for the coming summer.

She also quoted from a letter she and other Harvard faculty members sent to President Drew Faust last summer. The letter said in part: "Freedom of expression is an essential principle in an academic community, one that we fully support. Notwithstanding our commitment to the robust exchange of ideas, Swamy's op-ed clearly crosses the line into incitement by demonizing an entire religious community, demanding their disenfranchisement, and calling for violence against their places of worship. Indeed, India's National Commission for Minorities has filed criminal charges against Swamy, whose incendiary speech carries the threat of communal violence. When Harvard extends appointments to public figures, it behooves us to consider whether the reputation of the university benefits from the association. In this case, Swamy's well-known reputation as an ideologue of the Hindu Right who publicly advocates violence against religious minorities undermines Harvard's own commitment to pluralism and civic equality."

Under Harvard's governance system, the faculty vote is final, and does not require administrative approval. A spokesman for the university released only a brief statement: "Members of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences each year vote to approve or amend the course list for the Harvard Summer School. Yesterday, the faculty voted to approve the curriculum for the Summer School for the coming summer session with the exception of two courses, about which there was considerable discussion."

On his Twitter feed, Swamy said that the vote at Harvard was "nothing serious," explaining that "non-economists at Harvard don't like my views on how to protect India."

Citing Eck and a colleague who also wanted his courses dropped, Swamy also tweeted: "I have been held accountable at Harvard for what I write in India. This means India studies' [Michael] Witzel and Eck are accountable in India. Healthy?"

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education has spoken out against Harvard's taking any action against Swamy on the basis of his op-ed. The organization's blog noted that Swamy's op-ed calls for radical social change in India, but FIRE noted that American principles of free expression extend to calls for radical social change. As an example, it cited the legal right for people to call for the United States to become a communist country.

"We tolerate the widest possible range of political, social, cultural, and religious views because, for one thing, we trust in the marketplace of ideas to eventually sort it all out," the blog post said.

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