



Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's [Intellectual Freedom Committee](#). Questions can be directed to the IF Committee member who sent the message or to one of the [co-chairs](#) of the IFC. If you prefer this information in another format feel free to print the attached PDF.

Trigger Warnings and Safe Spaces in Higher Education.

Trigger Warnings (and Safe Spaces) have been a topic of concern and controversy across college campuses over the last few years. The public dialog surrounding the issue has intensified over a few highly visible cases, notably the release last August of a letter from Jay Ellison, the dean of undergraduate students at the University of Chicago, to the Freshman class of 2020 in which he states that the UofC will not provide students with trigger warnings or safe spaces. The issue has galvanized students against faculty and administrations, and has brought out worries about intellectual freedom and censorship in American education. While reading through arguments on both sides of this issue, I've felt confused about how to think about this. It does seem that both sides are managing to talk past each other. I think the best way for me to proceed with this Tuesday Topic is to present a list of articles and resources, both news and opinion, and let individuals come to their own conclusions about the tack that educators should take on this hot button issue. I'm going to use the controversy at the UofC as an initial lense, and then move into some more broad articles that talk about the issue generally, both in the context of education, and as a freedom of speech concern.

First, [This is an image of the letter](#) from the dean at University of Chicago.

Here is some fairly straight forward reporting on the UoC letter.

[From the Chicago Tribune](#)

[The New York Times](#)

[Inside Higher Ed](#)

A number of pieces that are for trigger warnings and safe spaces on campus regarding the UofC.

[This is an opinion piece from a UofC student.](#)

[This opinion piece from Slate's XXfactor blog](#) is critical of the dean's letter.

[A pro-trigger warning piece from Forbes](#) that argues that the writer of the letter misunderstands the issue.

And some pieces that are against trigger warnings...

[Opinion from The Federalist](#)

[This piece from the New York Magazine](#) provides a liberal critique of politically correct speech, and illustrates just how complicated the issue has become on the left. It was written a little earlier than the Chicago letter, but it's relevant to the issue in a broad sense

Here are two articles that have slightly different takes on the controversy.

[This one, from Vox](#), argues that the UofC anti-safe spaces letter isn't about academic freedom, but about power.

[And this one, from the Daily Beast](#), argues that it's all about keeping right-wing donors happy.

Finally, here are some articles and a podcast that examine the issue in a broader way, and provide some possible solutions and compromises.

[On The Media. You can listen to this radio show](#) online talk about the trigger warnings and the issue of speech on college campuses generally.

[This long form article on Slate](#) talks about trigger warnings in light of two kinds of therapy for treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

...And finally, [an article](#) with some links on the related topic of microaggressions.

I hope that the above articles will provide some context and help you think about this complex issue. I can tell you that I'm still personally having difficulty determining exactly what I think is the best way for Universities to handle trigger warnings and safe spaces, but I do get a sense that if both sides can listen to each other's concerns, compromise may be possible.

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