

It's about making trans people unemployable

written by Parker Molloy
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By now, you may have seen the story making the rounds. It's about a University of Oklahoma student named Samantha Fulnecky who received a zero on a psychology essay, filed a discrimination complaint, and got her trans graduate instructor placed on administrative leave. Conservative media have framed this as religious persecution: a brave Christian student punished for citing the Bible. The governor of Oklahoma has weighed in. Libs of TikTok has amplified it to hundreds of thousands of people. Turning Point USA is demanding that the instructor be fired.

But if you actually read the essay — which TPUSA helpfully published — you'll find something different than what's being advertised.

The assignment asked students to write a 650-word reaction paper responding to an article about "Gender Typicality, Peer Relations, and Mental Health." The rubric was straightforward: 10 points for showing a clear tie to the assigned article, 10 points for providing a thoughtful reaction rather than a summary, and 5 points for clarity of writing. Students were given suggested approaches like discussing whether the topic was worthy of study, applying the findings to their own experiences, or offering alternate interpretations of the researchers' conclusions.

Fulnecky's essay mentions the article exactly once: "The article discussed peers using teasing as a way to enforce gender norms." That's it. The remaining words are a sermon about what God wants for gender roles, culminating in the claim that "society pushing the lie that there are multiple genders and everyone should be whatever they want to be is demonic and severely harms American youth."

She also calls her classmates "cowardly" for not sharing her views.

This is not a good essay. Not because of the religious content — you can absolutely bring religious perspectives into academic work — but because she just. ... didn't do the assignment. A reaction paper is supposed to react to something. Fulnecky barely acknowledged the source material existed before launching into a position statement

that would have worked just as well (or poorly) for any article tangentially related to gender.

The graduate instructor, Mel Curth, gave remarkably patient feedback. “Please note that I am not deducting points because you have certain beliefs,” Curth wrote, “but instead I am deducting point[s] for you posting a reaction paper that does not answer the questions for this assignment, contradicts itself, heavily uses personal ideology over empirical evidence in a scientific class, and is at times offensive.”

Curth explicitly told Fulnecky that it’s “perfectly fine to believe” normative gender roles are beneficial. The problem was the logical contradictions (arguing people aren’t pressured into gender roles while simultaneously arguing religious pressure to conform is good), the lack of engagement with actual course material, and, yes, calling a group of people “demonic” in an academic paper.

“I encourage all students to question or challenge the course material with other empirical findings or testable hypotheses,” Curth wrote, “but using your own personal beliefs to argue against the findings of not only this article, but the findings of countless articles across psychology, biology, sociology, etc. is not best practice.”

Another instructor, Megan Waldron, who teaches a different section of the same course, backed the grade. She found it “concerning” that Fulnecky didn’t view bullying or teasing as a bad thing, and noted that “your paper directly and harshly criticizes your peers and their opinions.”

None of this matters to the people amplifying this story. The essay is a prop. The point is that Curth is trans.

The quiet part out loud

Fulnecky’s mother, Kristi Fulnecky, a lawyer who defended a number of Jan. 6 rioters, has been busy on social media. She’s been retweeting posts that say things

like “If you claim to be a transgender — you should be banned from working in any school. Transgenderism is a mental illness,” and “Individuals who identify as trans should be automatically disqualified from holding any position as teacher or professor.”

To that last one — a post explicitly calling for employment discrimination against all trans people — Kristi Fulnecky replied: “Agreed! Proud of my daughter!”

This is the tell. The family isn’t arguing that this particular grading decision was wrong. They’re celebrating their daughter’s role in a broader campaign to make trans people unemployable. The discrimination complaint, the media tour, the outrage — it’s all in service of the goal stated plainly in the posts Kristi Fulnecky is boosting: Trans people should not be allowed to work in education.

Chloe Cole, a detransitioner who’s built a lucrative career as an anti-trans activist, demanded that the university be defunded until Curth is fired. TPUSA’s post about the incident included the line: “We should not be letting mentally ill professors around students.”

The playbook here is familiar. Find a trans person in a position of minor institutional authority. Manufacture or amplify a confrontation. Blast it through the conservative media ecosystem until it becomes national news. Watch as institutions capitulate.

It works. Curth — who, by the way, had reportedly just received an Outstanding Graduate Teaching Award from OU’s Department of Psychology — is now on administrative leave. The university’s statement emphasized its commitment to “protecting every student’s right to express sincerely held religious beliefs,” which is a fascinating way to describe giving a bad grade to a bad essay.

The targeting system

The throughline in all of these cases is Libs of TikTok, an account run by Chaya

Raichik that has become a kind of targeting system for the anti-trans movement. Raichik reposts content from LGBTQ people and their allies, often with mocking commentary, and her millions of followers do the rest.

Schools, children's hospitals, and libraries featured on the account have reported receiving bomb threats. Teachers have resigned or been fired. Medical providers have faced death threats. The pattern is consistent enough that critics have called Raichik a "stochastic terrorist" — someone who publicly demonizes people in ways that predictably inspire supporters to commit violence, while maintaining plausible deniability about any specific act.

The case studies are piling up.

Remember Dylan Mulvaney? In April 2023, she posted a single sponsored Instagram video featuring a personalized Bud Light can. That was it. That was the whole controversy — a trans woman appeared in a beer ad. ... to her own audience. The resulting harassment campaign left her scared to leave her house, ridiculed in public, and followed. Kid Rock filmed himself shooting cases of Bud Light with a rifle. The company's sales tanked, and Bud Light never publicly stood by her.

"For a company to hire a trans person and then not publicly stand by them is worse, in my opinion, than not hiring a trans person at all," Mulvaney said. "It gives customers permission to be as transphobic and hateful as they want."

Or take what happened at Texas A&M just a few months ago. In September, a Republican state representative named Brian Harrison posted a 23-part social media thread with the headline: "CAUGHT ON TAPE. TEXAS A&M STUDENT KICKED OUT OF CLASS AFTER OBJECTING TO TRANSGENDER INDOCTRINATION." The post got millions of views. Within days, the professor — Melissa McCoul, who had taught the same children's literature course at A&M at least 12 times since 2018 — was fired. The dean and department head were removed from their positions. And then

the university president resigned.

A faculty committee later unanimously ruled that “the summary dismissal of Dr. McCoul was not justified” and that the university failed to follow proper procedures. But by then the damage was done. The message had been sent.

This is Oklahoma

It’s worth noting that this is all happening in Oklahoma, a state that has become something of a laboratory for anti-trans policy. Governor Kevin Stitt has signed bills barring trans students from using bathrooms consistent with their gender identity, banning gender-affirming care for minors, prohibiting nonbinary gender markers on IDs, and blocking trans girls from girls’ sports.

In January 2024, the state’s then-Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ryan Walters, appointed Raichik, who has no connection to the state and does not live there, to the Oklahoma Department of Education’s Library Media Advisory Committee — giving the person behind Libs of TikTok an official role in deciding what books Oklahoma students can read.

A month later, a 16-year-old nonbinary student named Nex Benedict died. Just one day after being beaten in a school bathroom at Owasso High School — the same district where, in 2022, a teacher “greatly admired” by Nex had resigned after being targeted by a Libs of TikTok post. According to Nex’s mother, the bullying had started after Stitt signed the bathroom bill.

Nex’s death was ultimately ruled a suicide. The climate in which Nex lived — a climate shaped by the very people now celebrating Samantha Fulnecky as a “warrior of Christ” — is not incidental to this story.

What this is actually about

There's a reason Riley Gaines, a middling college swimmer who once tied for fifth place in an NCAA championship, now has a full-time career as an anti-trans activist with a nonprofit, speaking fees, and congressional testimony.

In 2023, the Leadership Institute — a nearly 50-year-old nonprofit that trains conservative activists and counts Mitch McConnell and Mike Pence among its alumni — launched the Riley Gaines Center with the goal of “protecting women’s sports.” The organization is funded by the Charles Koch Foundation and serves as a member of Project 2025’s advisory board. The Dick & Betsy DeVos Family Foundation donated \$100,000 to the center in 2023. In the first five months of its existence, the Leadership Institute paid Gaines more than \$126,000 as director.

She now has a podcast on Fox Nation, a merchandise line, two book deals, and has testified in or appeared with politicians in at least 21 states. Ron DeSantis’s presidential campaign paid her nearly \$12,000 for travel and consulting. She stood next to Donald Trump when he signed his executive order banning trans women from sports. This is what a fifth-place finish buys you if you’re willing to make hating trans people your full-time job.

And it’s not just Gaines. The infrastructure is growing. The Independent Council on Women’s Sports (ICONS), a nonprofit that describes itself as “not political,” went from about \$100,000 in revenue in 2022 to over \$1 million by 2024. ICONS is now funding three major lawsuits against the NCAA, arguing that trans athletes should be banned from women’s sports entirely. Chloe Cole, the 20-year-old detransitioner who demanded OU defund itself over the Fulnecky essay, testified in court that she earns upwards of \$200,000 annually for opposing gender-affirming care — money that flows through speaking engagements, donations, and her employment with the far-right organization Do No Harm.

This is an industry now. There are jobs, salaries, speaker bureaus, and career tracks. The right is always looking for new faces to put on this movement — young,

photogenic people who can be positioned as victims of trans overreach. The detransitioner who regrets her surgery. The swimmer who tied with a trans woman. The Christian student whose essay got a bad grade.

Samantha Fulnecky fits the profile. She's a college student. She's Christian. She wrote about her faith and got a bad grade from a trans instructor. It doesn't matter that the essay was genuinely bad, that two instructors agreed on the assessment, that the feedback was professional and patient, or that the grading rubric supports the decision. The narrative writes itself: trans professor fails Christian student for quoting the Bible.

What Fulnecky's mother is saying out loud — that trans people shouldn't be allowed to teach at all — is what this movement actually wants. The individual controversies are just vehicles to get there. Each one is designed to make an example of a trans person, to signal to every other trans person in education or health care or any public-facing role: This could happen to you. Keep your head down. Better yet, leave.

The next one

Here's what's going to happen next.

Somewhere, right now, a trans person is teaching a class, or coaching a team, or working at a library, or providing health care. They're doing their job. They're probably good at it. And at some point, someone is going to have a problem with them. Maybe a parent, maybe a student, maybe a coworker. The problem won't really be about job performance. The problem will be that they're trans.

That person, or someone connected to them, will take their grievance to social media. If they're lucky, Libs of TikTok will pick it up. Or Turning Point. Or one of the other accounts that have built massive followings by turning trans people into content. The post will frame the trans person as a predator, or a groomer, or a bully,

or a tyrant. It won't matter what actually happened. The framing is the point.

Then the calls will start. To the school board, to the administration, to the HR department. Local news will cover the "controversy." A state legislator will demand an investigation. The institution, desperate to make the problem go away, will put the trans person on leave. Maybe they'll be fired outright. Maybe they'll resign because the harassment makes it impossible to do their job. Either way, they're gone.

And then the person who started it all will go on Fox News. They'll get a GoFundMe. Maybe a speaking gig at a conservative conference. If the story is big enough, if it goes viral enough, they might get something more. A podcast. A book deal. A center with their name on it.

This is not a guess. This is a pattern. We've watched it happen over and over again, and we will keep watching it happen until the institutions that capitulate to these campaigns start recognizing them for what they are: coordinated attempts to purge trans people from public life, dressed up as individual controversies.

Oklahoma University had a choice. They could have looked at the essay, looked at the rubric, looked at the feedback, and said: this grade was justified. They could have noted that two instructors independently reached the same conclusion. They could have pointed out that Curth had just won a teaching award. They could have said, simply, that they don't put instructors on leave for doing their jobs.

Instead, they folded. They issued a statement about protecting religious expression, as if the issue were ever about that. They gave the machine exactly what it wanted: another trans person removed from a position of authority, another signal sent to every other trans person watching.

The next time this happens, and there will be a next time, the institution will face the

same choice. Most of them will make the same decision Oklahoma did. They'll calculate that the cost of standing firm is higher than the cost of sacrificing one employee. They'll tell themselves it's just one case, one person, one controversy. They won't see, or won't admit, that each capitulation makes the next one easier.

Mel Curth did nothing wrong. They graded a bad essay honestly and gave thoughtful feedback that any reasonable educator would recognize as fair. For that, she's on administrative leave, her name is circulating through right-wing media as the latest villain, and her career may never recover.

The essay isn't the point. Curth is the point. And the point after Curth will be someone else — another trans teacher, another trans health care provider, another trans person who made the mistake of existing in public while the machine was looking for a new target.

That's what this has always been about.

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