

Boston University Center for
Gender, Sexuality, and Activism

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Dear Boston University Students and Colleagues,

The Anarchist Bookfair was scheduled to take place at Boston University on November 9th-10th in the George Sherman Union with workshops in the College of Arts and Sciences. The organizers cancelled this event on Friday, November 8th and then rescheduled for November 9th at the Democracy Center in Cambridge with all workshops cancelled. It was announced later that a few of the workshops would be held on November 10th at Makeshift Boston. The reason that the Anarchist Bookfair was cancelled was due to a meeting between the Center for Gender, Sexuality, and Activism (CGSA) with the Student Activities Office (SAO) on Thursday, November 7th that was called that day. The CGSA was told that the organizers would be required to pay for security by the BU Police which could cost in the thousands of dollars. The original plan was for the CGSA to pay those fees and for the Anarchist Bookfair to fundraise to pay them back. Upon further conversation, the Anarchist Bookfair didn't feel comfortable raising money that would go to police based upon their mission statement.

During the meeting with SAO, we were informed that they had not known about the event until recently because we did not go through the proper channels of setting up this event. We had followed the protocol of our predecessors, but found out in our meeting that this was not fully aligned with SAO protocol and the reason they noticed this year was due to the group of five Nazi counter-protestors that engaged with the bookfair last year. This encounter was successfully deescalated by the organizers of the Anarchist Bookfair within ten minutes and there were no instances of violence or injuries. We did not follow the correct procedures laid out for student groups and we will be more diligent about following them in the future and fostering better communication with SAO. Furthermore, we were informed security costs would apply to any group that had a possibility of counter-protestors. The security fees were not applied due to the message of the Anarchist Bookfair.

While the security fees were not deliberately placed in response to the message of the Anarchist Bookfair, I do believe it brings attention to issues in the protocol that SAO must follow. Under the guise of free speech, the only groups that can afford to have their voices heard on campus are those that have money which is power. It is not profitable to spread awareness about structures that perpetuate inequality but rather its a penniless job taken up by altruistic activists. People like Ben Shapiro spread their hate with an agenda that is tied to money and corporations, used to create divisions and demonize people aspiring upward mobility and safety. The organization, Young Americans for Freedom, have no issue in their ability to foot the bill for the security costs of Ben Shapiro. However, despite their ability to pay, they were able to use the guise of free speech to get those costs waived once the conservative student body raised their voice. Organizations that don't hold that structural wealth to pay for security will not have the opportunity to be heard at BU unless the fees get waived which is unclear in all protocol. I hope that these structural constraints on free speech will be discussed as the Free Speech task force continues to investigate what constitutes free speech and how that fits into Boston University.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Faith Puleikis".

Faith Puleikis
Director of the CGSA