

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# TRIGGER WARNINGS: CRITICAL THINKING OR MANIPULATION?

By Stephen L. Bakke  May 27, 2014



### *Here's what provoked me:*

“Trigger warnings” provide an alert that material about to be read, heard or observed might be upsetting. After Debra Saunders recently took issue with the use of this in academia, Megan Dolezal followed up with an aggressive attack on Ms. Saunders’ argument. My opinion is that Dolezal actually helped advance Saunders’ arguments.

### *Here's my response:*

#### **Trigger Warnings Equal Manipulative Instruction**

In a May 27 Counterpoint article “‘Trigger warnings’ equal critical thinking,” Megan Dolezal takes issue with an article by Debra Saunders in which the concept of “trigger warnings” was characterized as stifling both the opportunity to think and freedom of expression. Ms. Saunders, concludes that in academia, it’s no longer “safe to think for yourself.” She writes that it seems “**we cannot handle free speech.**”

Ms. Dolezal disagrees and states: “Saunders displays the knee-jerk reaction of yelling “free speech! ..... Her lazy and reductive analysis is unacceptable ..... I give her an F.”

Dolezal actually advances Saunders’ concerns by explaining: “a ‘trigger warning’ ..... alerts students to difficult content and prepares them to approach that content” (in a manner to best process and interpret it) ..... “making people aware of things like racism, classism, sexism ..... privilege and oppression.” Dolezal inadvertently displays her support for manipulative teaching techniques by demonstrating how instructors tell students how to think and what their priorities should be.

At the college level the use of “trigger warnings” has been extended to protesting against certain speakers because they disagree with the “anticipated” content of those speakers’ presentations. And remember that account of a plan to bring a camel on a Twin Cities campus to “lighten the mood” during finals week. It was met with objection on the basis of animal cruelty, animal disrespect, possible racial or religious motivation and ..... (get this) ..... it would “promote a negative carbon footprint”! **Those are “trigger warnings” at work!**

