

OUT NEWS

BYU now requires incoming students to read controversial 'musket fire' speech

The 2021 address, which defends "marriage as the union of a man and a woman," called on members of the Mormon church to defend its teachings with "musket fire."



— Students walks past the entrance of Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, on March 1, 2012.

George Frey / Getty Images file

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By Emi Tuyetnhi Tran

LGBTQ students and advocates at Brigham Young University slammed the school for requiring all freshmen read a controversial 2021 speech that they say incited violence and hatred against the queer community.

A new required [course](#) at the Provo, Utah, university titled "UNIV 101: BYU Foundations for Student Success, a New Chapter for BYU" features the controversial "musket fire" speech by Latter-day Saint religious leader and former BYU President Jeffrey R. Holland as a core reading. Starting in the winter 2024 semester, all incoming students, except transfer students, will have to take the course in their first semester.

In the speech titled "[The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University](#)," Holland condemned criticisms of the Mormon faith, calling on members of the church to defend its teachings with "musket fire." One such teaching, Holland said, includes "the doctrine of the family and defending marriage as the union of a man and a woman."

He also spoke about the issue of homosexuality as it relates to the Mormon church – "We have to be careful that love and empathy do not get interpreted as condoning and advocacy," he said – and addressed the potential "friendly fire" that could occur as a result of defending the faith.

"Sometimes it isn't friendly, wounding students and the parents of students – so many who are confused about what so much recent flag-waving and parade-holding on this issue means," Holland said.

BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins told NBC News that the class has been "well received by our students" and the materials for the course "involve several important and significant addresses that have been given at BYU."

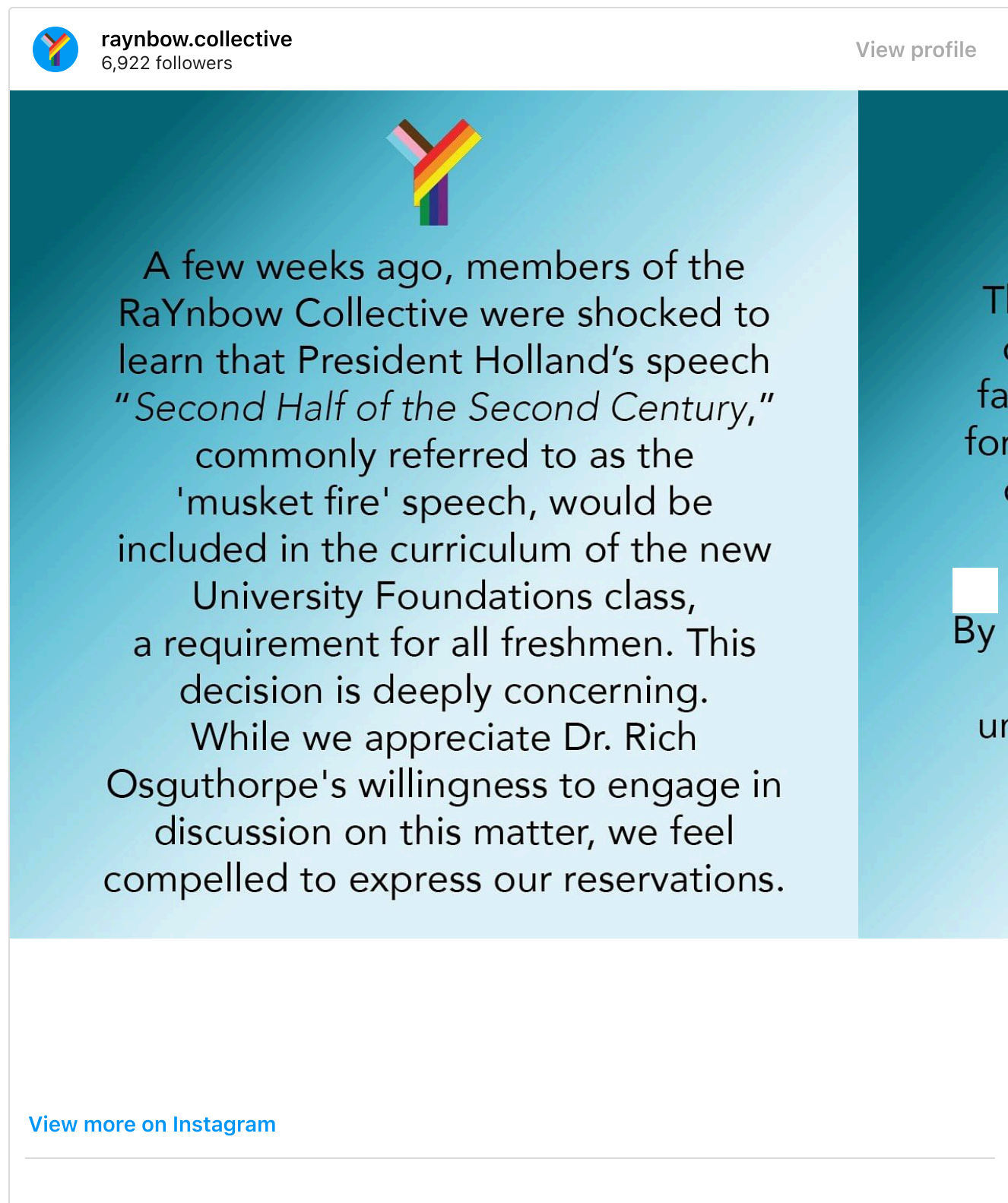
"We believe that we have a shared primary identity as sons and daughters of God. We welcome LGBTQ students and are grateful for all those who choose BYU because of its environment of covenant belonging," Jenkins said.

'Emboldening' violence and hate

Members of BYU's community have criticized the inclusion of the speech in the "UNIV 101" course, saying it underscores the idea that LGBTQ students and faculty do not belong at the university.

The RaYnbow Collective, a group that aims to empower and uplift BYU's LGBTQ community, posted a [statement](#) to Instagram on Friday that criticized the move.

"It has caused considerable mental, physical, and emotional harm and has been used to justify acts of violence. This decision is insensitive, inconsiderate, and fails to recognize the diverse experiences and needs of our student body," the statement reads.



raynbow.collective

A few weeks ago, members of the RaYnbow Collective were shocked to learn that President Holland's speech "Second Half of the Second Century," commonly referred to as the "musket fire" speech, would be included in the curriculum of the new University Foundations class, a requirement for all freshmen. This decision is deeply concerning. While we appreciate Dr. Rich Osguthorpe's willingness to engage in discussion on this matter, we feel compelled to express our reservations. The use of this speech, which was originally intended for staff and faculty, has significant implications for queer students, suggesting they do not belong and fostering an unsafe environment.

By insinuating that queer students lie outside the boundaries of the university's mission and vision, the speech perpetuates harm and undermines efforts to foster a sense of belonging.

Moreover, it has caused considerable mental, physical, and emotional harm and has been used to justify acts of violence. This decision is insensitive, inconsiderate, and fails to recognize the diverse experiences and needs of our student body.

We urge reconsideration and exploration of alternative messaging that promotes unity and respect for all members of the BYU community.

We will always advocate for initiatives that foster a kinder campus community, where all students feel valued, supported, and included.

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Gracee Purcell, president of the collective, told NBC News that the 2021 speech is a painful memory for the university's LGBTQ community and that she was "shocked" to learn that this speech in particular was chosen for the first-year curriculum.

The rhetoric of Holland's address, Purcell said, has been used against the queer community at BYU and fostered an environment in which LGBTQ students and faculty do not feel safe.

"In the most extreme cases, we're seeing what the use of violent language does and how it empowers people," Purcell said. "We've gotten a lot of death threats that are directly connected to this language of 'musket fire.'"

Purcell described numerous instances in which she and members of her community felt unsafe on BYU's campus.

"I have had recent experiences where I have been in physically unsafe situations where protesters have showed up to my events open carrying weapons," she said. "What adds to that is I definitely don't think that BYU has my back when it comes to it."

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