



Council on American-Islamic Relations
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February 27, 2014

Dr. John P. Johnson
President
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
600 South Clyde Blvd,
Daytona Beach, Florida 32114

Dear President Johnson:

As a Chief Executive of the Florida chapter of Council on American-Islamic Relations, the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I am writing to express my concerns about a speaker scheduled to lecture at your university, Dr. Jonathan Matusitz.

We were shocked to learn that Dr. Matusitz would be a part of Embry-Riddle's 2014 President's Speaker Series, which is intended to encourage productive debate to engage the student body, campus community and area residents.

Dr. Matusitz has an extensive history of vilifying Islam and Muslims. He is also the membership director and speaker bureau organizer for the central Florida chapter of ACT! for America, according to [his CV, page 28 \(pictured below\)](#), though [he denies holding any such positions in an Orlando Sentinel op-ed he wrote](#).

Community Service

- Membership Director, ACT for America – Central Florida Chapter, Fall 2011-
- Co-organizer of the Speakers Bureau, ACT for America – Central Florida Chapter, Fall 2011-

ACT! for America is designated as an anti-Muslim hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League. As ACT!'s key leader in central Florida, Dr. Matusitz can be seen in videos making sweeping indictments of Islam such as, **"This panel is about radical Islam; I would take the radical out. The problem is Islam."** And: **"My colleagues say Islam is a religion of peace. I say it's a religion of pieces -- piece of body here, piece of body there."** Please see the this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpGNXn_5fk0 **"EXPOSED: UCF Prof. Jonathan Matusitz's Irrational Anti-Muslim Prejudice"** with highlights of his rhetoric and beliefs that have been documented to incite people to violence and promote blanket hatred of Islam and Muslims, which is not conducive to a healthy academic environment.

Examples include:

“Mainstream Islam is also a problem”

“When I turn on the television and there is a news report about interfaith meetings between Christian pastors and Jewish rabbis and imams, I wonder what the purpose is. Islam doesn’t let other religions co-exist with it -- don’t they get it?”

“People say it’s only a tiny minority of Muslims we need to worry about -- NO.”

“We have to worry about people who are willing to follow the Quran to the letter.”

“Coexistence with Islam is not possible. Do I say that? No, the Quran says so. When I see those ”coexist” bumper stickers on cars, I laugh because I think it’s ridiculous. I’m sad at the same time. I think a lot of “coexist” people mean well; they wear their heart on their sleeves but they do not know their enemy.”

“Islamophobia is a fear of Islam. Some people say it is an irrational fear of Islam; anybody with a fraction of a brain should be afraid of Islam because it’s a dangerous doctrine. Is it irrational? In my view, no. My view of Islam is not irrational, it’s based on facts and based on statistics. Look at what they’re doing in Europe. Am I a Islamophobe? No, because my fear is not irrational, my fear is very much irrational. I know Islam all too well.”

Florida Today reported that, during one of Matusitz’s previous talks, an audience member **“stood up and advocated violence against Muslims.”**

We must recognize that hate speech has led to hateful and even violent actions. In Norway, Anders Breivik, a white supremacist terrorist who slaughtered dozens of children, was inspired by arguments made by hatemongers like Dr. Matusitz. In Florida and throughout the United States, dozens of people have been assaulted and even killed because their attackers perceived them to be Muslims.

As for Matusitz’s claims about terrorism, they are simply misleading and incorrect. the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security reports that for the 11 years since 9-11, terrorists who identified as Muslims killed 33 people in the U.S. In that same time period, 200 people were killed by terrorism carried out by white supremacists, and 180,000 people were murdered in America.

According to the FBI, between 1980 and 2005, six percent of terrorist attacks in the U.S. were carried out by Muslims. According to political science professor Robert Pape of the University of Chicago, most terrorists are motivated by politics, not religion. Matusitz conveniently ignores these facts, instead choosing to demonize an entire religious minority. People who promote hatred have a right to do so, but we believe moderates have a responsibility to reject such hate and intolerance.

CAIR and the American Muslim community strongly support freedom of speech. We also understand that freedom of speech does not obligate any institution to provide a platform to honor those who advocate hate. Dr. Matusitz has the right to spew his views in a private venue, but our tax dollars shouldn't go to promote and legitimize a known bigot and Islamophobe.

Matusitz certainly has the right to express his views; we just want to make sure that Embry-Riddle's Safety & Culture statement and mission defined in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion are honored, as Embry-Riddle does have an active Muslim Students Association and many international students from the Middle East whose safety, well-being, and feeling of belonging might be jeopardized by an inciting talk by Dr. Matusitz. Such a talk would also destroy any sort of credibility of religious tolerance at the university.

Embry-Riddle's Safety Culture Statement

Safety is the number one priority at Embry-Riddle. We are committed to maintaining an environment in which students, faculty, staff, and visitors have a high safety comfort level with all university facilities and functions.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion

We consider our most important missions to be the stewardship of our students, who are our primary focus at Embry-Riddle. Their well-being and feeling of belonging is paramount to this office. It is our goal to ensure that every student feels welcomed and included into the Embry-Riddle community.

Just because one has the right to preach hate and intolerance doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. Promoting hatred against any group makes our nation weaker, not stronger.

Therefore, we request that the invitation to Dr. Matusitz be withdrawn and that he be replaced with another speaker who fairly depicts the reality that terrorism is most often influenced by political ideology rather than blaming and demonizing a religion of over 1.6 billion people.

Matusitz's rhetoric clearly goes against the pluralism and tolerance this nation was founded on and echoes un-American and fascist ideologies that Embry Riddle should have no part of. We look forward to your review of this matter, and if you need any additional information, please contact me directly at 813-541-4321.

Sincerely,

Hassan Shibly
Executive Director

CC:

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Denise Marie Ordway, Higher Education Reporter Orlando Sentinel
Embry-Riddle Muslim Student Association
Embry-Riddle Saudi Student Association