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### INSIDE TODAY'S BULLETIN

#### Free Speech Tops Back-To-School List

By: Joe Murray, The Bulletin  
09/17/2007

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Students, professors, and parents know that FIRE will work toward making 2007-08 the year which free speech was reinstated as a hallmark of higher education,

While parents may still be buying notebooks, pens, pencils, calculators and laptops as their college kids readjust to campus life, one civil rights watchdog group wants to make sure one more item makes the list: the First Amendment.

"Students, professors, and parents should know that FIRE will work toward making 2007-08 the year in which free speech was reinstated as a hallmark of American higher education," explained Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE).

FIRE is a nonprofit educational foundation that specializes in protecting the First Amendment rights of the scores of students on America's campuses. The organization, which was founded by conservative University of Pennsylvania Professor Alan Charles Kors and former ACLU attorney Harvey A. Silvergate, is dedicated to educating students and parents about their rights on campus.

"We begin this year more prepared than ever to combat the repressive tendencies at universities across the country," stated Lukianoff. Through the enforcement of broad-based speech codes that FIRE argues are unconstitutional, college administrators often characterize protected speech as "harassment," "incivility," and/or "offensive" and punish the student speaker(s).

As part of its crusade against campus censorship, FIRE has announced new resources available for students who are faced with such situations. According to a written statement issued by FIRE, "This year, FIRE's new resources include the Campus Freedom Network, the Red Alert list and a Web 'widget' that provides up-to-date information about campus speech codes across the country."

The Campus Freedom Network is a coalition of student and faculty alike that is united in their fight to preserve speech on campus. Members stay in contact largely by an interactive Web site and serve as a warning mechanism for those schools not respecting the First Amendment. FIRE's Red Alert list, which includes Johns Hopkins University and Tufts University, consists of universities and colleges the organization deems the "worst offenders."

"The current situations at both Johns Hopkins and Tufts show that these schools continue to disregard the rights of their students and faculty," Lukianoff said.

Justin Park, a junior at Johns Hopkins, learned the lesson of censorship the hard way when the university found that the 18-year-old was guilty of the school's policy against harassment. Park, who at the time was the social chair of the Sigma Chi fraternity chapter, posted an advertisement for the fraternity's "Halloween in the Hood" party. The advertisement drew instant criticism and Park was asked to remove the ad, which he did immediately. The matter, however, was not over.

Dorothy Sheppard, dean of students for Johns Hopkins, described the ad as "offensive racial stereotyping," and Park was found guilty of harassment and received a punishment that may include suspension. The decision is being appealed.

In light of the incident, the university broadened the scope of its speech code by enacting a new civility code that prohibits "rude, disrespectful behavior" on campus. To FIRE, such a code is unconstitutional and chills the rights of free speech on campus.

FIRE is equally concerned with the treatment the First Amendment has received at Tufts, for the university found the conservative newspaper, The Primary Source, guilty of harassment when the paper published a satirical Christmas carol and an advertisement that read "Islam: Arabic Translation - Submission."

"Until Johns Hopkins repeals its civility code and Tufts admits that simply publishing verifiable facts about a religion is not 'harassment,' FIRE must keep both institutions on our Red Alert list and continue to warn the public about the sad state of students' rights there," asserted Lukianoff. With the 2007-08 academic year already off to a rocky start, those at FIRE anticipate their new resources will receive a good deal of use in the coming months.

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