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College Revamps Policy After Banning *The Passion* It's a Victory for Students' Rights, Says FIRE

By Jim Brown and Jody Brown
February 4, 2005

(AgapePress) - A Florida community college says it will no longer bar a Christian student group from showing the film *The Passion of the Christ*. The move comes after a prominent civil rights group exposed inconsistencies in school policy. In addition to dropping its unwritten ban on R-rated movies, the school has also dumped a policy that required a faculty member to be present at all student group events.

The [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) had criticized [Indian River Community College](#) (IRCC) in Ft. Pierce for banning Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, even though it had allowed the performance of an obscene skit and a viewing of an R-rated documentary on campus. FIRE's Greg Lukianoff says IRCC's change of heart is a victory for free speech, students' rights, and common sense. ([See earlier story](#))

"Christian students simply wanting to watch one of the most successful movies of all time should not have to have been put through all of this just to exercise the right of freedom of expression," the FIRE spokesman says. "But we are now pleased that it's over, and we've offered publicly to help Indian River College if it needs any future advice on how to respect their students' rights."

According to Lukianoff, the college was facing intense media pressure and the realization it was on shaky legal ground. "The major motivating factor was the public scrutiny -- the fact that they were on ABC News, for example," he explains. "[T]hat's sort of shameful [because] people have rights, and those rights are supposed to be respected."

In a statement, IRCC admitted its policy on public presentations "has not been interpreted and applied consistently throughout the college." The school also stated that, as a result of the legal review process of its policy, it will no longer use the R-rated movie designation established by the Motion Picture Association of America as a criteria in approving student activities or events.

That process, says IRCC, "confirmed that certain types of expression -- including obscenity, libelous speech, and language used to instigate violence or disruption -- are not protected by the Constitution" and will be considered "incompatible" with the mission of ensuring a high-quality learning environment.

Lukianoff applauds the school's openness to examining itself. "IRCC had a rule that treated college students like children, but it has shown the courage to admit it was wrong," he says. Still, he adds, "it's sad that it required national attention in order to force a university to respect its students' rights."

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