



Dartmouth Praised for Taking Lead in 'Free Expression'

By Jim Brown and Jody Brown
May 16, 2005

(AgapePress) - [Dartmouth College](#) in New Hampshire is being lauded for leading the Ivy League "in respecting individual liberty and free expression."

Dartmouth no longer has a poor free-speech rating from the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE). The school had been under scrutiny for de-recognizing a fraternity for publishing an internal newsletter that insulted two female students. Following the incident, Dartmouth posted two letters on its website -- one from the college president and one from the dean -- justifying the punishment. But after being contacted by FIRE, the college removed those letters from the website.

FIRE president David French Dartmouth is "clearly positioning itself as a national leader in the battle for free expression on campus." And although he does not consider the situation at Dartmouth perfect, French calls the school's decision regarding the letters an "enormous step forward."

The letters from Dartmouth president James Wright and dean James Larimore, says FIRE, appeared to be "inconsistent" with the college's traditional policies supporting freedom of expression and dissent. But because statements made in those letters "elevated 'feelings' over free expression," and because they were used to justify speech-related punishment and appeared on the college website, FIRE concluded they effectively constituted a speech code.

However, Dartmouth general counsel Robert Donin claims the school has not changed its free-speech policies. "There was some language in those letters that FIRE interpreted as representing a broader prohibition on the expression of opinions or views in general," Donin remarks, "and the correspondence that we've had with FIRE recently was intended to clear up that distinction."

According to Donin, the letters were removed from the website to avoid "confusion" about the school's free-speech policies. "I think there was a misunderstanding about some statements that were made back in 2001 in connection with a specific case that involved some pretty intense, personal abuse directed toward two undergraduate women," the attorney recalls. "Some comments were made at the time by the president of the university and the dean of the college concerning that particular incident."

Donin says Dartmouth is pleased with FIRE's recognition of the school's "longstanding commitment to freedom of expression." French says his organization is hopeful the entire Ivy League eventually will follow the lead of Dartmouth -- as well as the University of Pennsylvania -- in refraining from school-mandated student censorship and threats of punishment.

© 2005 AgapePress all rights reserved.

 [E-mail this page to a friend](#)

 [Printer-Friendly Version](#)

[Read all of our current headlines](#)