



# Campus News

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## State Attorney General will review RA policy

### UW System president seeks counsel from Lautenschlager on university ban

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The debate over UW-Eau Claire's policy prohibiting resident assistants from conducting religious, political or sales-related activities in their residencies reached the state attorney general this week.

UW System President Kevin Reilly enlisted the legal counsel of Wisconsin Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager in a Monday letter, asking for her to assess the legality of Eau Claire's ban on such activities.

A group of legislators from around the state also requested Lautenschlager's opinion in a Wednesday letter.

The System's decision to seek Lautenschlager's input came after Reilly and the Board of Regents recognized the legal complexity of the debate, Doug Bradley, System director of communications, said.

"Once we saw that this was really a conundrum ... we asked the attorney general for her advice on this," Bradley said.

Lautenschlager's opinion, Reilly wrote in the letter, will help guide Eau Claire and other universities across the System in establishing a written policy.

"Given the apparent similarity between (Eau Claire's) policy and some policies elsewhere in the UW System ... I am requesting your written opinion as to whether the university's practice is consistent with First Amendment standards," Reilly wrote.

The System became involved after Eau Claire officials said the university would review its policy and consult System Legal as to the legality of restricting certain activities in an RA's room or residence hall.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education has lambasted Eau Claire in a series of releases and online articles, calling the university's policy unconstitutional.

University officials have said the policy grew out of concerns that allowing RAs to hold certain activities, like Bible studies, would compromise their availability and ability to relate with students.

An article posted on FIRE's Web site Monday stated the university has expanded its policy to banning political and sales-related events, broadening "its assault on civil liberties."

Mike Rindo, executive director of university communications, said Eau Claire's "long-standing" policy has, in fact, not changed and has always applied to religious, political and sales-related events.

The university is awaiting counsel from System Legal and Lautenschlager before altering its policy in any way, he said.

"There has been no change in UW-Eau Claire policies or practices regarding certain restrictions for resident assistants leading and organizing specific activities," Rindo said.

Legality and the interest of students will be the determining factors in the university's final written policy, he said.

"We want to make sure we are meeting all legal standards," he said. "(The new policy) will be based not only on legal findings, but what's also in the best interest of all of our students."

Bradley said the establishment of a system-wide policy is a viable option that he expects Reilly and the Board of Regents to

consider after sorting through the legal aspects of the debate.

"That might be one of the things that the president and the Board of Regents decide to do," he said. "Nobody wants to get anything rolling until we get where the legality stands."

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