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TC prof strikes a blow for free speech

by **Dan Fearson**

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Temple College administrators deemed their own actions inappropriate after one of the college's professors found himself in hot water with them for posting "God is dead" on his office door.

The phrase, taken from German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's "The Gay Science," is followed by the words, "God remains dead. And we have killed him." By no means is this the first time Nietzsche's words have created a firestorm. At least as early as the 1960s, students and teachers have used his words to provoke thought.

Kerry Laird, a first-year literature and composition instructor, last month posted the philosopher's words in German: "Gott ist tot." College administrators asked him to remove it, saying it had "the potential of creating a hostile or intimidating learning/work environment."

Laird said he put up the German phrase after he removed a cartoon from his door showing Smokey Bear, a Girl Scout and a Boy Scout that read "Kids - don't (an expletive beginning with the letter "f") with God or bears will eat you."

Laird said he received a complaint about the cartoon and removed two of the four letters from the word in an attempt to keep it up without offending anyone. However, Laird said, the cartoon was ripped from his door when he was out of his office. He decided to put in its place the quote and a bear crossing sign.

He was eventually asked to remove the German phrase via e-mail from Lesley B. Keeling-Olson, TC's interim director of the liberal arts, who forwarded a message from Mark Smith, TC's interim vice president of education services. Smith reportedly received an e-mail from a student complaining about the phrase.

"I was kind of exasperated after I was asked to remove the phrase," said Laird. "I was like 'OK, fine,' but it was clearly a violation of my freedom of speech rights."

The e-mail from Keeling-Olsen said:

"Simply posting a cartoon or note on a door that can be considered offensive, insightful, and/or controversial is not a part of academic freedom and does not reflect well on Temple College and has the potential of creating a hostile or intimidating learning/work environment."