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OPINION

CAMPUS ALERT: HUG AT YOUR OWN RISK

By the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

May 29, 2007 -- EVERY hour, students at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania commit sexual misconduct. How? No, the student body isn't made up of sexual predators. It's because Gettysburg's sexual-misconduct policy makes even the most innocent student interactions a violation.

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Gettysburg requires its students to gain consent before sexual interaction. No surprises there: That's not only the law, it's common sense. But what isn't common sense is how Gettysburg *defines* "sexual interaction" and "consent."

The school's policy considers "brushing, touching, grabbing, pinching, patting, hugging and kissing" to be sexual interactions. Making matters worse is the fact that Gettysburg requires "verbal," "continuing" and "active" consent to engage in these "interactions." Under the policy, hugging your friend without permission is as serious an offense as rape.

In practice, complying with Gettysburg's policy seems to mean that each and every physical contact between students is doomed to be embarrassingly awkward. (Can I hold your hand?" "Yes." "Can I continue to hold your hand?" "Yes.") But of course Gettysburg students don't comply with these ridiculous prohibitions; they're students, not robots.

Every Gettysburg student has likely violated the policy at some point. So

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that the policy still exists means that administrators have explicitly reserved the right to punish students for this behavior when they deem it necessary. Trusting administrators with the power to punish on the promise that they won't abuse that power is a losing proposition.

The university promised to change its policy at the start of the school year - but an academic year later, the old rules are still in effect. Students should be extremely suspicious - and they should demand change.

- Authored by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (the fire.org)

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