



The Crimson White

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NEWS

Students plan to fight for their First Amendment rights

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Staff Reporter
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Members of the Mallet Assembly, an honors program located in Byrd Hall, say they plan to fight a new Office of Residential Life proposal to ban all displays on dormitory windows that would go into effect this fall.

The policy would be a broader restriction aimed at all displays in dormitory windows, *The Crimson White* reported July 16. Res Life director Lisa Skelton denied the policy was aimed at Confederate flags and said it was simply a measure to improve the campus environment.

"The intent is to welcome people to campus, not squelch anyone else's rights," she said.

But members of Mallet Assembly and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education claim that is exactly what the new policy will do. Greg Lukianoff, director of legal and public advocacy for FIRE, said the organization wrote a letter to the University and UA President Robert Witt objecting to the original draft of the policy.

He said the new, broader policy is a step in the wrong direction, and reflects the University's paternalistic view toward students.

"UA has gone above and beyond what is necessary in this case, which is really tragic," Lukianoff said.

Lukianoff said that while FIRE cannot promise any assistance to students who wish to protest the new policy, his organization strongly encourages them to do so. While he admits the University has a legal right to ban displays on windows, he said it was the wrong message for a university to send to its students.

"Universities should be seeking to get students used to accepting ideas they don't agree with. I don't think anything good comes from trying to shelter adults from ideas," he said.

The next step remains unclear, but Lukianoff said he thinks everyone in the country should know about the University's attitude toward the rights of its students. Witt and Res Life officials have said they do not believe students would object to the new policy.

Byrd Hall professor-in-residence Byron Rush White received a phone call from Res Life officials ordering him to remove a Confederate flag hanging in a hallway of the dormitory because of the new rule, *The CW* reported June 18. White refused, and

Res Life did not pursue the issue pending further review of the new policy.

The University's action angered many liberal and conservative groups that advocate free speech, most notably the League of the South, the Alabama chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and FIRE.

Allan Guenther, assistant director of marketing for Res Life told *The CW* in July that he did not want to trivialize students' feelings on the issue, but he thought the new policy would not be a big deal.

"I think the overwhelming majority [of students] will blink and move on," Guenther said.

Lisa Skelton told *The Tuscaloosa News* last month that she had consulted with the Residence Hall Association, a group that represents students who live in dormitories, citing a need to have student input.

A member of the RHA executive board who refused to give her name said in mid-July that the group's opinion could not be considered the opinion of the students living in residence halls because the students were gone for the summer. The executive said this week that the RHA has no further comment on the policy at this time.

White said he has contacted other organizations interested in opposing the new policy, including the SGA. He said new students are being told to continue decorating their windows because the new policy is not in effect. If the policy does go into effect, he said the University should expect students in Byrd Hall to resist.

"Malletteers are going to stand up for their rights." White said.

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