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Academic Freedom Group Charges Fla. College Violated Students' Rights

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - A Florida community college is being accused of employing a shameful double standard after banning Mel Gibson's 2004 film, *The Passion of the Christ*, from being shown on campus.

Officials at Indian River Community College in Fort Pierce recently barred the Christian student fellowship on campus from screening *The Passion*, citing an unwritten school policy against R-rated movies. But now comes word that IRCC approved a screening of the R-rated documentary film, *Welcome to Sarajevo*, at a college-sponsored event last year.

Dr. Johnny Moore, IRCC's Vice President for Student Affairs, claims the other film was allowed since it was used in an instructional setting. "Presentations in the classroom have been handled differently from student clubs and activities," he says.

Moore has also defended the decision not to allow the biblically-based Gibson film by arguing that the school's unofficial ban on R-rated movies is to protect underage students attending the college under its dual-enrollment program with local high schools. However, the college has in the past hosted a live performance on campus that included an obscene dramatic reading -- one which involved a character simulating sex with an image of Christ.

Greg Lukianoff of the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) says IRCC has a very paternalistic attitude toward its students, and this latest incident is no exception. "They've shown extraordinary arrogance, they've shown extraordinary foolishness, and they've shown outright contempt for the rights of their adult students," he says.

Meanwhile, FIRE president David French contends that the Florida community college has gone beyond treating its students like juveniles and has actually trampled their "legal and moral rights to free speech and freedom of conscience." He says in banning the Christian group's showing of *The Passion*, the IRCC administration "is not acting to enforce an actual policy, but has instead singled out religious expression for censorship."

Indian River's VP of Student Affairs says, in light of the controversy over the *Passion* screening, the school may be changing its film policy. "We're working with legal counsel specializing in constitutional law to basically launch a review of our policies and procedures relating to student activities and events on our campus," he notes.

"If this legal review indicates that changes are needed, changes will be made," Moore adds. He says the administrators at IRCC wants to make certain that the school is striking a proper balance between setting appropriate standards on campus and protecting students' rights.

Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for *American Family Radio News*, which can be heard online.

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