



Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

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November 7, 2006

President Robert A. Wild, S.J.
Marquette University
O'Hara Hall, 101/102
P.O. Box 1881
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201-1881

Sent via U.S. Mail and Facsimile (414-288-3161)

Dear President Wild:

Thank you for your response to FIRE's letter of September 27, 2006 (enclosed). Unfortunately, our concerns regarding the threat to free speech at Marquette University remain.

In your response on October 16, 2006, you asserted that the matter regarding Stuart Ditsler's posting of a Dave Barry quote on his office door in the philosophy department "has now been resolved within the academic department." Ditsler, however, has informed FIRE that neither you nor other administrators have publicly addressed the state of free expression at Marquette. Ditsler, other students, and even professors are therefore left unsure of which forms of expression the university will tolerate. The question remains: are students and faculty now permitted to post materials on their office doors?

FIRE is also still concerned about the sentiment expressed in the e-mail James South sent to Ditsler and the other students sharing Ditsler's office, in which he stated that the philosophy department is not a "free speech zone." As we stated in our previous letter, free speech should be the norm and not the exception on campus.

Furthermore, your letter also made specific reference to the fact that the Barry quote was originally posted without attribution, and that "someone reading the quotation may not have understood the humor/satire of Dave Barry." The attribution of a quote in a situation like this, however, is irrelevant. Political opinions—whether from a commentator such as Barry or a Ph.D. student such as Ditsler—are rightfully protected speech in the larger society and should not be silenced at an institution that claims to value free expression.

Posting materials such as quotes, cartoons, and articles on office doors on a university campus is a common, even traditional, method of exchanging ideas and entering into dialogue. Such a practice should especially be promoted in the corridors of a philosophy department. Marquette's philosophy department website states that "the philosophical education of all students...is grounded in the pursuit of truth," and that "philosophy provides a principal forum for the serious discussion of the basic questions of life." The free expression of ideas—political or otherwise—should be welcomed and encouraged in such an environment, not feared and silenced.

We understand that Marquette is interested in promoting its identity as a Catholic university, but your letter also acknowledged the high regard you place on academic freedom. These two principles—the perpetuation of free expression and the root values of Catholicism—are not at odds here. Please stand up for the principle of academic freedom and let students and professors at Marquette know that their expression is protected.

Thank you for your consideration. We request a response from you regarding this matter by November 21, 2006.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Shibley
Vice President

cc:

Madeline Wake, Provost, Marquette University
Arthur Scheuber, Vice President, Marquette University
Thomas Peters, Associate Vice President, Marquette University
Greg Kliebhan, Senior Vice President, Marquette University
James South, Philosophy Department Chair, Marquette University
Stuart Ditsler

encl.