



VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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April 24, 2014

Peter Bonilla, Director
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
170 S. Independence Mall W., Suite 150
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Mr. Bonilla:

Thank you for your letter to President Powers on behalf of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) expressing concerns regarding The University of Texas at Austin Events CoSponsorship Board's recent denial of a funding request from The UT Objectivism Society (Society). I am responding on President Powers behalf.

The University of Texas at Austin Events CoSponsorship Board (ECB) is comprised of nine student members who review and evaluate applications for funding submitted by registered student organizations. The ECB begins each academic year with a limited budget and a discrete amount of funds it can allocate to applying organizations during the course of the academic year. The ECB holds weekly meetings to consider presentations made by the applying organizations and determine which applicants will receive the limited funding available to the ECB. Because the funds requested by student organizations exceed the limited funds available for allocation, the ECB uses its best efforts to ensure that funding committed by the ECB will be invested in events that are logistically and financially feasible.

When making a decision about whether or not to fund an event, the ECB takes the following factors into consideration:

1. Will the event be held on campus and is it open to the entire UT community?
2. Have the organizers adequately planned and prepared for the event so that the funding will be used to its best ability (*e.g.* have necessary locations been reserved, has advertising been considered, have speakers been contacted, etc.)?
3. Does the estimated attendance at the event correspond with the amount requested so that the anticipated cost per head is reasonable?
4. As a co-sponsor and not a full sponsor of events, ECB will only fund up to 49% of any event – does the organization have a feasible plan to cover the remaining funds necessary to host the event?

The University recognizes that freedoms of speech, expression, and assembly are fundamental rights of all persons and are central to the University's mission. Students are free to express their views, individually or in organized groups, on any topic, in all parts of the campus, subject only to rules necessary to preserve the equal rights of others and the

other functions of the University. Consistent with recognizing these important freedoms, the content or viewpoint of a program proposed by a registered student organization is not a factor in the ECB's decision making process. The ECB has funded a large variety of events covering a myriad topics and a wide range of viewpoints throughout the years.

The UT Objectivism Society was one of four registered student organizations to discuss its application for funding at the ECB's March 19, 2014 meeting. At the start of this meeting, the ECB had only \$798.65 available to allocate for the remainder of the academic year. Applications must be received at least five weeks before the event date and can be submitted at any time during the academic year prior to the five-week deadline. The Society's funding application was received by the ECB on Thursday March 6th. Since the next Wednesday fell during the Spring Break holiday, March 19th was the first available opportunity for the Society to meet with the ECB based on when the Society submitted their application.

At the ECB meeting, the Society requested \$1920.64 in funding for the event. When asked how the group would cover remaining costs associated with the event, the Society representatives present at the meeting stated that they were utilizing GoFundMe to supplement the rest of the costs. At the time of the ECB meeting, the Society had only raised a total of \$130.38 of the \$1920.64 needed for the event through GoFundMe.

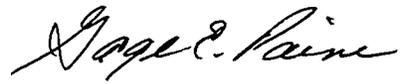
Given the limited amount of funding ECB had available at the time of the meeting, the timing of the Society's event, and the large disparity between what was available for the event and what was needed to hold the event, the ECB voted unanimously to decline funding for the Society's event. The content of the Society's program was not a factor considered by the ECB in reaching its decision.

While the ECB would like to provide every group that applies with the funding requested, it is not always possible to do so. In 2013-2014, 13 of the 57 groups who submitted applications did not receive funding including two of the other organizations that met with the ECB on March 19, 2014.

I regret that the basis for the ECB's decision was not communicated more effectively to the Society. Since learning about the concerns expressed in your letter, ECB members and University staff have met and discussed the need to provide information to funding applicants after an ECB decision has been made. I hope that an improved line of communication between the ECB and funding applicants will prevent a similar misunderstanding in the future.

Thank you again for taking the time to express your concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gage E. Paine".

Gage E. Paine
Vice President for Student Affairs
The University of Texas at Austin

cc: William C. Powers, Jr., President
Soncia Reagins-Lilly, Dean of Students
Mulugeta Ferede, Executive Director for University Unions