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FIRE QUARTERLY

SPRING 2021

Freedom of Tweetch

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tried to expel Kim Diei for her tweets.
With FIRE, she's defending her rights.

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The Biden administration threatens students' Title IX protections. What does this mean for due process?



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Dear FIRE Supporters,

The tumult of the year 2020 proved to us, if proof was needed, that FIRE has more work to do than ever — and one of the most obvious big-ticket items for FIRE in 2021 is in the area of Title IX reform.

Last year, FIRE celebrated a victory a decade in the making when the Department of Education finally put regulations in place requiring colleges to provide nearly all of the due process protections FIRE had sought for students accused of sexual misconduct. Students hitting campus (real or virtual) in fall 2020 finally had rights that were rare for them but old hat for the rest of us — things like the presumption of innocence, the right to face one's accuser, and the right to know the evidence for and against them.

Then, on March 8, President Biden told his new administration to undo it. On April 6, the Education Department officially started the process. I won't pretend that this wasn't a bad couple of days for FIRE. But it was a development for which we had prepared.

First, FIRE has been working to win the battle of ideas ever since the infamous 2011 "Dear Colleague" letter from the Education Department signaled a new era of Title IX enforcement that

would be far more intrusive on speech and due process rights. Because FIRE reached out and made our arguments effectively to both the right and the left, the arrival of the new due process guarantees ended up being far less controversial than almost anyone would have expected in the polarized national atmosphere of 2020.

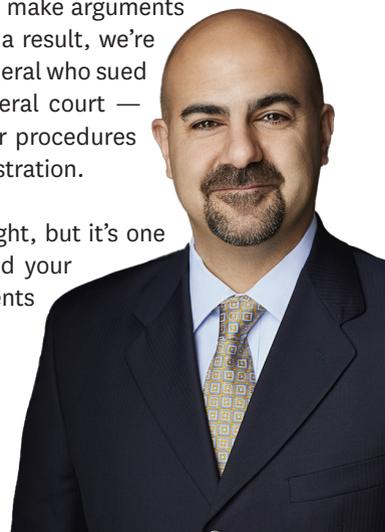
Even after the Biden announcement, the Los Angeles Times editorial board responded that the regulations "need a tweak, not an overhaul," calling the rules' introduction a "brief shining moment" for Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. I don't need to tell you that examples of such bipartisan approval are shockingly rare these days!

Second, we successfully engaged with policymakers to ensure that the new rules would be enacted through a transparent "notice and comment" process that gives them the force of law. (Nearly all previous federal rules about Title IX were issued as "guidance" documents like the infamous Dear Colleague letter, which can be issued or revoked at any time.) This means that no president or federal bureaucrat can simply order them undone; repealing or replacing them must go through the same notice and comment process that allows for public input and requires the government to explain its decisions

Finally and most importantly, FIRE worked with two allied groups to legally "intervene" in cases brought against the new regulations so that FIRE could make arguments that the government wouldn't. As a result, we're facing 18 "blue state" attorneys general who sued to overturn the regulations in federal court — giving us the chance to defend fair procedures regardless of the change in administration.

It will be a tough and expensive fight, but it's one we're determined to win. We need your help to do it. A generation of students will thank you.

Yours in liberty,
Robert L. Shibley



on that note...

FIRE issued a statement to the media on March 8 responding to the Biden administration's executive order to consider rescinding the due process protections in the new Title IX regulations. The New York Times quoted FIRE's Joe Cohn defending the regulations: "There are students who are raped on college campuses, and there are students who are wrongly accused, and we should not be choosing between which of those groups we wish to give justice," he said. "The one-sided rhetoric doesn't lead us to have confidence at this point that the rights of the accused will seriously be taken into account."

The 10 Worst Colleges for Free Speech

FIRE's 10th edition of the list features familiar censors and new bad actors. You'll read about several of them in detail later in the Quarterly.

Would you make a student homeless during the pandemic because you didn't like something he said? Or threaten faculty doctors fighting COVID-19 with termination for speaking to the press? If you're a campus official at one of the schools on this list, you just might!

In the 10th edition of our annual "Worst Colleges for Free Speech" list, FIRE named and shamed the worst in college censorship over the last year. And, as in years past, narrowing down the list was no easy task.

Below are FIRE's 10 Worst Colleges for Free Speech, presented in no particular order. Several are mentioned in detail later in the Quarterly, but we've included a short synopsis for the others here.

- **Fordham University — NYC**
Fordham censored Students for Justice in Palestine with one hand and a pro-Second Amendment student with the other.
- **Frostburg State University — Frostburg, Md.**
Looking to silence criticism related to its handling of COVID-19, Frostburg muzzled resident assistants and a student journalist.
- **New York University — NYC**
As a global pandemic spread rapidly, New York University warned its medical faculty to keep quiet — or else!
- **Northwestern University in Qatar — Doha, Qatar**
Northwestern canceled an event featuring a gay musician because it violated Qatar's 'cultural and social customs.'

- **University of Tennessee — UT Health Science Center, Memphis, Tenn. (P. 4)**
- **Haskell Indian Nations University — Lawrence, Kan. (P. 7)**
- **Collin College — McKinney, Texas (P. 8)**
- **Duquesne University — Pittsburgh, Penn. (P. 8)**
- **St. John's University — NYC (P. 8)**
- **University of Illinois at Chicago — Chicago, Ill. (P.8)**

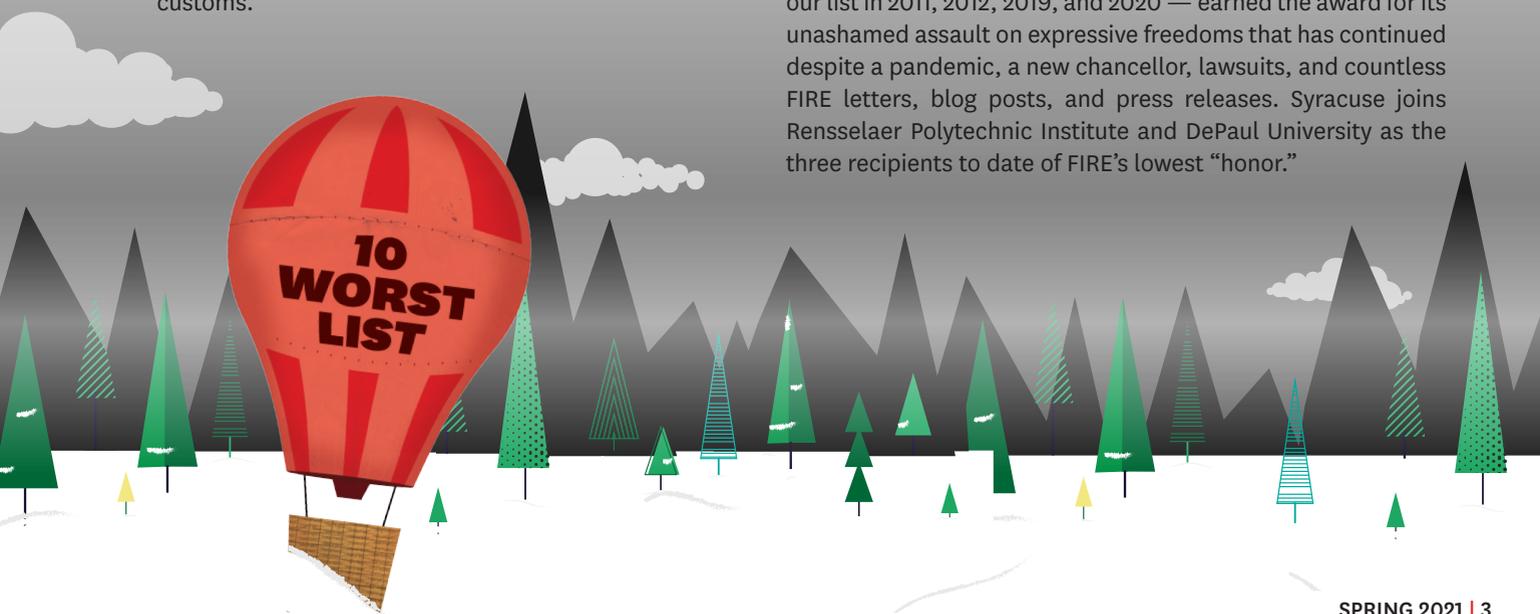
Detailed descriptions of each college's speech-chilling misdeeds are available on FIRE's website.

"Every single college on this list had a choice whether to suppress the viewpoints of their own students and faculty members — and every one chose to make the decisions that landed them on this list," said FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff. "We expected 2020 to be quieter than normal as institutions focused on mitigating effects of the pandemic. But what we saw astounded us. As COVID cases exploded, so did FIRE's cases of campus rights violations. Last year was the busiest in FIRE's history, showing that while nearly every facet of our lives changed during the pandemic, at least one aspect remained shockingly constant: Administrators will continue to censor students and faculty members for no damn reason."



FIRE also issued its third Lifetime Censorship Award, reserved for those colleges that appear so frequently on our list that they deserve special recognition.

This year, Syracuse University — which made our list in 2011, 2012, 2019, and 2020 — earned the award for its unashamed assault on expressive freedoms that has continued despite a pandemic, a new chancellor, lawsuits, and countless FIRE letters, blog posts, and press releases. Syracuse joins Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and DePaul University as the three recipients to date of FIRE's lowest "honor."



The University of Tennessee tried to expel a grad student for a tweet about Cardi B and other social media posts.

Now she's fighting back.



Teetering on the edge of expulsion from her pharmacy program for her social media posts, Kimberly Diei sought help to defend her rights. Now, after two unconstitutional investigations and facing the threat of a third, she seeks justice.

Diei filed a First Amendment lawsuit against the University of Tennessee in February, backed by FIRE. Diei's suit argues that colleges cannot police a student's personal expression outside of school simply because they do not like or understand it.

"It's just a matter of time before they come back for another investigation into my expression on social media," said Diei, who is seeking her doctorate in pharmacy with an emphasis on nuclear pharmacy. "UT spied on my social media activity — activity that has no bearing on my success as a pharmacist or my education. I can be a successful and professional pharmacist as well as a strong woman that embraces her sexuality. The two are not mutually exclusive."

In September 2019, one month after enrolling at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, an administrator told Diei that the university received an anonymous complaint about her Instagram and Twitter accounts — and that she was under investigation.

Diei appeared before the college's Professional Conduct Committee, which unanimously determined that she violated university policies with what the committee deemed to be her "crude" and "sexual" posts. Refusing to identify the policies she violated or even the posts in question, the committee required Diei to write a letter reflecting on her behavior. She completed the letter despite reservations that the committee was violating her rights.

Less than a year later, the committee notified Diei of a second investigation, this time with screenshots from her social media accounts. In one tweet, Diei contributed to a trending discussion on Twitter about the song "WAP" by Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion, suggesting lyrics for a possible remix. In another, Diei joked about the amount of time she spends getting prepared to go out by referencing a popular Beyoncé song.

The photos and tweets the school identified — which comply with the social media sites' policies — are fully protected by the First Amendment. Further, the accounts are operated under a pseudonym and do not reveal Diei's identity as a student or indicate any association with the university.

On Sept. 1, 2020, four days after being notified that she was once again under investigation and still without any information on which policies she allegedly violated, the committee unanimously voted to expel Diei. She appealed to the dean, who reversed the decision almost a month later — only after a letter from FIRE.

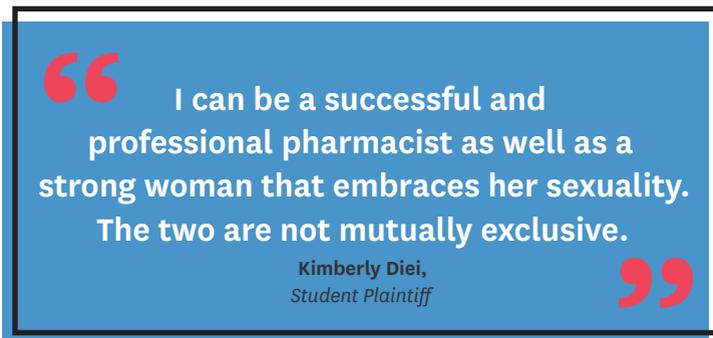
"The First Amendment protects the right of students to suggest lyrics for a Cardi B remix on Twitter and Instagram. Period," said FIRE attorney Greg H. Greubel. "Kim is an authentic and successful woman, and FIRE believes that it is important to show the public that students like Kim are capable of being successful professionals while also being free to personally express themselves on social media. Kim is standing up for every American who hopes to have a personal life in addition to their professional life."

As a public institution bound by the Constitution, UT cannot censor a student's protected speech. FIRE and the courts have long held that even threats of

investigations for protected speech have a chilling effect on expression. To this day, UT has never revealed which policies Diei allegedly violated, apart from the vague claim that her posts violated "various professionalism codes."

The lawsuit aims to stop UT from further investigations into Diei's social media, eliminate the college's overbroad professionalism policies, and win damages for Diei over the college interfering with her First Amendment and due process rights.

"We work tirelessly to defend students and faculty members without resorting to lawsuits, but universities need to know that FIRE will use every tool at our disposal when it comes to holding them accountable for rights violations," said Vice President of Litigation Darpana Sheth. **"Our message to university censors is clear: Defend individual rights or we'll see you in court."**





Zoom and gloom:

Campus dissent silenced amidst pandemic

As the pandemic cleared out campuses and quieted once-bustling classrooms, FIRE expected censorship to take a backseat to the health crisis. But as cases of COVID-19 took off, so too did case submissions from students and faculty nationwide alleging rights violations.

A report from FIRE shows how censorship spread during the pandemic, and how the tools higher education used to keep students informed, such as Zoom, aided in silencing dissenting voices.

“One clear lesson from the pandemic is that censorship can have a serious negative impact on public health,” said FIRE Director of Targeted Advocacy Sarah McLaughlin, author of *COVID on Campus: The Pandemic’s Impact on Student and Faculty Speech Rights*. “COVID-19 requires extensive and, in some cases, unprecedented measures to protect public health. Censorship isn’t one of them.”

Colleges abused their authority in three principal ways:

- Issuing unconstitutional gag orders to silence criticism of institutions, including forbidding resident assistants from speaking openly about their safety concerns when they felt institutional policies put their health at risk.
- Censoring speech related directly to COVID-19, including forbidding faculty doctors fighting the pandemic from speaking to the media.
- Applying campus measures in the name of public health that threaten individual rights, including tracking attendees of private meetings, forcing students to agree to public health pledges, and blaming the pandemic for censorship of unrelated speech, including — puzzlingly — a virtual play about a gay Charlie Brown.

As submissions about rights violations skyrocketed, FIRE warned colleges that public health practices must be clear, published, and consistently enforced.

The report also examines how Zoom is complicit in silencing dissenting voices. Reports accuse the company of closing accounts at the behest of the Chinese government due to their viewpoint. As Americans debate the role of censorship and technology companies, the question remains: In a higher ed landscape dominated by virtual learning, what happens when it is Zoom Video Communications, Inc. that is picking and choosing “appropriate” viewpoints?

“COVID-19 forced education online — and introduced new challenges to free expression,” said McLaughlin. “When we outsource classrooms to internet services like Zoom, we must be prepared for the possibility that they may import censorship.”



on that note...

As some universities began to reopen for the fall semester, FIRE learned of a troubling trend: student employees keeping silent about their COVID-19 reopening concerns out of fear that they would face consequences for speaking out.

At Louisiana State University, RAs were banned from criticizing their school’s COVID response under a policy — which FIRE could only obtain through a public records request — that warned: “Even though you may be discussing your own experiences, you will be identified as an LSU staff member, so you are representing the university. This is not an appropriate time to air your disagreements with Residential Life.” To the detriment of their student employees’ rights, LSU ignored FIRE’s recommendations for improving its policy.

Some universities listened to FIRE’s counsel and worked to revise their restrictive policies. At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Virginia (which both earn FIRE’s highest “green light” Spotlight rating), administrators confirmed that their media relations policies would be improved so resident assistants’ speech would no longer be unduly burdened.

Student reporter sues university president for forbidding journalism

Jared Nally is fighting for his rights — and the rights of student reporters across the country.

Nally wants Haskell Indian Nations University, a public institution operated by the federal government, to answer for the 90 days he was silenced, without any due process, under a directive that banned him from engaging in basic acts of journalism. He also wants Haskell to restore over \$10,000 of funding that the university inexplicably shorted the newspaper, approve its registration as a student organization, and revise the unconstitutional policy on campus speech used to issue the directive.

Backed by FIRE, Nally and The Indian Leader filed a federal lawsuit in March demanding just that.

“Joining our student newspaper gave me a voice, and unfortunately it’s going to take a lawsuit for the university to listen to it,” said Nally, editor-in-chief of Haskell’s award-winning student newspaper, The Indian Leader.

In October, Haskell President Ronald Graham issued a personally signed “directive” to Nally, threatening him with disciplinary action for requesting information from government agencies and failing to treat members of the Haskell community with the “highest respect” after he published articles critical of the university.

Joined by the Native American Journalists Association and the Student Press Law Center, FIRE wrote to Haskell, demanding that the university rescind its threats and reminding university leadership that they can be held personally and financially responsible for threatening freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Graham never responded.

Nally labored under the threat of punishment for months. On Jan. 13, the Bureau of Indian Education, the federal agency that oversees Haskell and is a named defendant in the lawsuit, told FIRE that Graham meant to rescind the directive, but the letter was never sent due to an “administrative error.”

The directive highlighted an already-contentious relationship between The Indian Leader and Haskell. Administrators repeatedly ignored Nally’s requests that the administration recognize the newspaper as an official student organization. Without this recognition, the paper does not have an official adviser, cannot receive full funding, and does not have regular, reliable access to its student bank account. Haskell withheld more than \$10,000 in funds from the paper without any notice or explanation.

Haskell claims to protect students’ First Amendment rights — which it is obligated to do as a public institution — but only permits speech that is consistent with Haskell’s “CIRCLE” values, like “respect.” While these values may represent laudable goals, Haskell departs from its obligations under the First Amendment by mandating that student expression comply with these vague and subjective standards.

“Haskell is making it very clear that they put institutional reputation above student rights,” said FIRE attorney Katlyn Patton. “We’re not only defending Jared’s constitutional rights, but the rights of all Haskell students, and student reporters across the country. In doing so, we’re showing public institutions that the First Amendment is non-negotiable.”

The lawsuit was filed in conjunction with local counsel Doug Bonney.



UPDATE: While FIRE prepared this issue of the Quarterly, Haskell President Ronald Graham further threatened campus rights. Graham chastised his “detractors” and forbade all employees, including faculty, from expressing opinions about the administration. Days later, another administrator sent an equally troubling email to faculty forbidding them from mentioning their Haskell employment when speaking with reporters.

On March 25, FIRE wrote to the Bureau of Indian Education, the federal agency that operates Haskell, to report these rights violations. FIRE demanded that Graham immediately rescind the directives, which unconstitutionally limit the ability of faculty to speak as private citizens on matters of public concern. On April 6, the BIE rescinded both directives in a quick victory for FIRE!

Faculty rights are in jeopardy. So FIRE is turning up the heat.

Almost 30% of our cases involve faculty rights: a percentage that has increased in recent months. Here we focus on some of our biggest cases involving faculty expression, and how FIRE is gearing up to help even more faculty members in 2021 and beyond.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Syracuse, New York

Five months after Syracuse University suspended a chemistry professor for writing “Wuhan Flu or Chinese Communist Party Virus” on his syllabus, Jon Zubieta was reinstated to his teaching role after FIRE’s intervention. Syracuse suspended the professor the same day the syllabus circulated online. While it’s heartening to see Lifetime Censorship awardee Syracuse University right this wrong, the long suspension over Zubieta’s clearly-protected speech is still an affront to academic freedom.

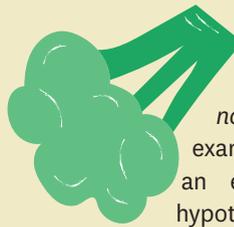


protected under the university’s strong institutional promises of free speech and academic freedom. Earlier this year, a faculty grievance committee’s independent analysis agreed that he should not have been terminated. FIRE continues to bring attention to Duquesne’s failure to protect expressive rights.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

Chicago, Illinois

While Gary Shank was fired for mentioning the N-word, law professor Jason Kilborn was fired in December for *not* mentioning it. Kilborn included in a final exam a hypothetical fact pattern involving an employment discrimination case. The hypothetical referenced “profane expressions for African Americans and women,” identified as expurgated text (“n_____” and “b_____”). After the question was condemned by students, the law school issued a public statement that it was conducting a “thorough review” of the matter. FIRE wrote to UIC explaining that Kilborn’s hypothetical is protected by academic freedom and the First Amendment and called for UIC to make clear that it would not investigate or punish Kilborn.



COLLIN COLLEGE

McKinney, Texas

This year, Collin College ended its relationship with three professors over their criticism of the institution. Professors Audra Heaslip and Suzanne Jones were told that the college’s senior administration had intervened to overturn recommendations that their contracts be renewed — after they raised concerns about the college’s COVID-19 reopening and established a campus chapter of a non-bargaining faculty union. A third professor, Lora Burnett, was fired after emailing district President H. Neil Matkin privately to criticize the college’s reopening plan. She also drew the ire of a local politician after she tweeted during October’s vice presidential debate that Mike Pence needed to shut “his little demon mouth up.” FIRE continues to advocate for their reinstatement.



ST. JOHN’S UNIVERSITY

New York City

In October, St. John’s removed adjunct professor Richard Taylor from the classroom indefinitely after finding him in violation of the school’s anti-bias policy, without either showing him the evidence against him or providing him an opportunity to appeal. His transgression: he asked his history students to consider whether transatlantic slave trade had any positive effects on biodiversity. St. John’s maintains it got one complaint from an actual student in the class and 300 form letters from a student group calling for him to be fired, accusing Taylor of asking students to justify slavery. He didn’t.



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Professor Gary Shank is fighting for his rights after being fired in October for his brief mention of the N-word in a relevant class discussion about why its use is considered inappropriate in most settings. FIRE has argued since before the termination that the word’s use in a relevant class discussion is



FIRE launches Faculty Legal Defense Fund; **First Amendment Lawyers Association** **National Chair Ronald G. London to lead effort**

College and university faculty members of all political stripes are facing greater threats to their expressive rights and academic freedom than at any other time in recent memory. That's why on March 31, FIRE launched a new Faculty Legal Defense Fund that will provide free legal representation to public college faculty members who need it. The fund features a 24/7 telephone hotline for faculty in need of immediate assistance at **(254) 500-FLDF (3533)**.

Made possible through generous support from the Stanton Foundation, FIRE is pleased to announce attorney Ronald G. London will lead the fund's efforts. London is the former president and now national chair of the First Amendment Lawyers Association.

"I'm thrilled and honored to be selected to help lead this expansion of FIRE's 'first responder' capabilities in safeguarding

faculty members' academic freedom and ability to express diverse views," said London.

The Faculty Legal Defense Fund will augment FIRE's ability to effectively assist faculty facing threats of censorship and punishment for speech and research, ensuring that faculty who need legal help get it quickly.

"Adding the Faculty Legal Defense Fund to FIRE's arsenal will allow us to help more faculty — faster," said FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff. "We will continue to litigate cases in-house to establish rights-protective precedents, continue to fiercely advocate in the public square for those whose rights are denied on campus, and now, with the creation of this legal fund, we will multiply exponentially our ability to assist those faculty members who need it in a way and at a pace we never could before."

“

Adding the Faculty Legal Defense Fund to FIRE's arsenal will allow us to help more faculty — faster.

*Greg Lukianoff,
FIRE President and CEO*

”





Donor Spotlight: Rob and Jamie Taylor



“The growing intolerance on college campuses and throughout many K-12 learning institutions in the U.S. requires those of us who support the First Amendment to take visible, defensive action. Speech is a fundamental human right, but more importantly, speech is subjective, and what offends us may not offend you. It is vital to prevent the censure of people who may hold minority views because we advance as a civilization when all people participate in academic and civic processes that allow for the debate and defense of ideas — good ones and bad ones!”

When our educational institutions restrict speech and limit our rights, we slide down the slippery slope of intolerance towards ignorance and/or authoritative rule. We support FIRE’s efforts to educate all stakeholders about their constitutionally protected rights, and when necessary, defend students and faculty with all means available to their disposal when these rights are violated or subjugated. As Libertarians who are passionate about education, we are delighted to support FIRE in its important mission.”

Rob and Jamie Taylor are dedicated members of FIRE’s Ember Club. Their investment in FIRE enables our team to offer a robust defense to individuals needing our help and supports education initiatives at the high school and collegiate levels. FIRE is deeply grateful to have them on our team.

You can learn more about The Ember Club at thefire.org/donate. If you would like to discuss joining the Ember Club, please do not hesitate to contact us at support@thefire.org or 215-717-3473.

In 8-1 ruling,

Supreme Court allows students’ free speech zone lawsuit to proceed

The Supreme Court in March issued its ruling in *Uzuegbunam v. Preczewski*, holding that former Georgia Gwinnett College student Chike Uzuegbunam’s First Amendment lawsuit against his alma mater was not rendered moot after the institution changed its free speech zone policy. The Supreme Court held that Uzuegbunam’s remaining claim for nominal damages would provide sufficient redress for his alleged harm to give him standing to continue the suit.

The decision is welcome news for students seeking to vindicate their constitutional rights via litigation. FIRE had argued in favor of this result in a series of four amicus curiae briefs filed in support of Uzuegbunam and his fellow plaintiff, former student Joseph Bradford.

Students have few reliable options for securing judicial redress when their free-speech rights are infringed. Equitable-relief claims are frequently mooted by graduation or by revision of the challenged policy, and speech restrictions often do not inflict financial injuries that rise to the level of compensatory damages. As a result, nominal damages, which address violations that do not result in compensable financial loss, are often the only remedy available.

Today’s opinion recognizes the importance of nominal damages claims for students and others seeking redress for a constitutional rights violation.

“The Supreme Court got it right,” said Darpana Sheth, FIRE’s vice president of litigation, in response to the decision. “Today’s ruling protects students’ ability to vindicate their priceless First Amendment rights and hold public university officials accountable.”





FOWL PLAY:

University of Pennsylvania denies hunting club official recognition

Creaturart Images / Shutterstock.com

During the COVID-19 pandemic, over 750 registered student groups at the University of Pennsylvania have been able to host virtual events. But Penn students interested in hunting, archery, and shooting are being denied permission for even virtual activities.

On March 17, FIRE called on Penn to stop engaging in viewpoint discrimination and promptly process the students' application for recognition.

"In refusing to officially acknowledge the hunting club, Penn's administration is missing the mark," said Zach Greenberg, FIRE senior program officer. "Penn must afford these students the same rights and privileges it already provides to its hundreds of student groups."

In March 2020, a group of Penn students applied to register the Hunting, Archery, and Shooting Club to "promote sustainable conservation, marksmanship, and ethical hunting practices through education and training." Despite Penn's ostensible commitment to students' rights and the students meeting all necessary criteria for club recognition, the club's application continues to sit in limbo over a year later, even as other groups receive approval. Penn claims that due to the "nature of the group's mission" it cannot make an approval decision until the university returns to normal operations.

A delayed approval means that the club cannot use university resources to fundraise, advertise, or grow its membership as an official Penn student organization. Nor can the club host virtual events or activities as a registered student group. By continuing to deny registration, Penn prevents the group

from meaningfully participating within the Penn academic community.

The group's leadership told FIRE they "understand that the university is facing a pandemic, but it's been over a year; we have watched other clubs be approved during this time and we'd like to be treated equally."

Although Penn officials wrote that the "nature of the group's mission and potential group activities" may pose public health risks and therefore preclude the group's approval, other clubs focused on in-person activities, such as dance troupes, a cappella groups, and sports teams, have maintained their registration and continue to meet virtually during the pandemic. Additionally, Penn registered other groups in the past year, including the Penn Surf Club, whose mission also clearly promotes outdoor activities that, if conducted, would violate university COVID-19 policies.

Penn's ongoing refusal to process the club's application for registration violates the university's commitment to students' rights. Penn's "Guidelines on Open Expression" state that the university "affirms, supports and cherishes the concepts of freedom of thought, inquiry, speech, and lawful assembly."

"We will not let this evasive response stand when students' rights are at stake," Greenberg said. "Today's letter demands that Penn align its actions with its commitment to free expression and association. **By engaging in viewpoint discrimination and delaying the club's approval process, Penn is shooting itself in the foot."**



University of Pennsylvania hunting club organizers Krzysztof Wojtak, Richard "Alex" Martino, and Chris Choe are working with FIRE to defend their free association rights.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS OF FIRE'S 2020-2021 FREE SPEECH ESSAY CONTEST!

FIRE extends its congratulations to the winners of our annual free speech essay contest for high school juniors and seniors. The winners bring home \$20,000 worth of scholarships.

This year's prompt asked students to draw on current events, historical examples, personal experiences, or other FIRE resources to pen "a persuasive letter or essay to convince your peers that free speech is a better idea than censorship." Our top submission imagined a letter from early 20th century rabbi Stephen S. Wise to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

FIRE received nearly 3,000 entries from across the country and enjoyed reading so many different takes on why free speech is a better idea than censorship. Rising juniors and seniors can enter again when we reopen the essay contest for the 2021-2022 school year in September.

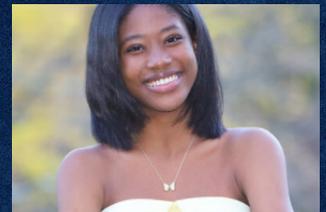
Without further ado... the winners are:



Maxwell Kearney



Sami Al-Asady



Jenna Smith

First Place – \$10,000 Scholarship
Maxwell Kearney – Westlake High School
Thousand Oaks, Calif.

Second Place – \$5,000 Scholarship
Sami Al-Asady – Ironwood High School
Glendale, Ariz.

Third Place – (3) \$1,000 Scholarships
Salome Augusto – Stone Bridge High School
Ashburn, Va.

Jenna Smith – Kent Place School
Scotch Plains, N.J.

Margaret Ludwig – Mat-Su Career and Technical High School
Wasilla, Alaska

Runners-Up – (4) \$500 Scholarships
Olivia Rodgers – Quincy Senior High School
Quincy, Ill.

Deepa Rao – James Madison High School
Vienna, Va.

Lily Cain – Northwestern High School
Poplar, Wis.

Anjana Peddireddi – Centerville High School
Dayton, Ohio

BUT WAIT! There's more...