



SPEECH FIRST

Speech First Sues the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Challenging Four Policies that Chill Student Speech

“On a regular basis, The University of Illinois sends a clear message to students who wish to engage in political and religious speech: there are some views that are welcome, and others that are not. Students deserve to be able to express themselves and voice their opinions without fear of investigation or punishment – which is why these policies must be reformed.”

– Nicole Neily, President and Founder of Speech First

Champaign, Ill. — Speech First, a nonprofit membership association working to combat restrictions on free speech and other civil rights at colleges and universities across the United States, filed a lawsuit against the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign—*Speech First v. Killeen et. al* — in the United States District Court for the Central District of Illinois as part of its efforts to help restore free speech and expression to America’s universities.

Through the use of four policies – the leafleting policy for non-campus elections, the Bias Assessment Response Team (BART), University Housing’s Bias Response Protocol, and the No Contact Directive – the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has created an elaborate investigative and enforcement regime designed to restrain, deter, suppress, and punish speech concerning political and social issues of public concern.

In its 2017-2018 annual report, the school’s Bias Assessment and Response Team received 265 reports of 128 unique incidents of alleged “bias.” According to the report, “in categorizing incidents, the program relies on the perceptions of the reporting party, when available, and on the judgment of team members.”

Programs like the Bias Assessment Response Team, the University Housing Bias Protocol, and the No Contact Directive have been weaponized against students who express viewpoints outside the mainstream – subjecting students to the whims of university officials, who have tremendous discretionary power in adjudicating alleged violations.

Speech First student members at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign are unable to participate in the political process through passing out flyers because of the school’s prior approval policy, and cannot speak on political and religious topics because they fear they will be

anonymously reported to university authorities through the Bias Assessment Response Team and/or receive a No Contact Directive.

“Through the creation and active enforcement of its Bias Assessment Response Team, University Housing Bias Protocol, the No Contact Directive, and the prior approval requirement for flyers related to non-campus elections, administrators at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have become the arbiters of what kinds of speech are – and are not – welcome on campus,” said Neily. “As a public university, UIUC is bound to uphold the First Amendment, and these policies violate both the spirit and the letter of the law.”

Speech First has asked the court to declare that the leafleting policy, prohibition on bias-motivated incidents, and No Contact Directive programs are unconstitutional, and to enjoin both the Bias Assessment Response Team and University Housing Bias Protocol programs.

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