



SPEECH FIRST

Speech First Sues the University of Central Florida, Challenging Three Policies That Suppress and Punish Student Speech

Orlando, FL. — 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 today against the University of Central Florida — ***Speech First v. Cartwright, et al.*** — in the Orlando Division of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida as part of its efforts to help restore free speech and expression for American college students and reinforce the need for academic discourse in higher education.

Through the use of three policies – the University’s discriminatory harassment policy, its computer use policy, and its Just Knights Response Team (JKRT), the school’s version of a bias response team – the University of Central Florida and its administrators have created a series of rules and regulations that restrain, deter, suppress, and punish speech about the political and social issues of the day.

Speech First members at UCF are unable to express themselves and voice their opinions without fear of investigation or punishment. According to the University, “discriminatory harassment” can occur virtually anywhere, at any time, by any medium. The University’s corresponding policy applies to incidents on campus and to off-campus incidents that have “continuing adverse effects on or create[] a hostile environment for students...” Once a student’s speech is reported, an investigation is launched and that student is subject to disciplinary action.

Similar rules apply to online speech for students “who use university information technology resources.” The University prohibits using its network to send messages “that reasonably could

be perceived as being harassing, invasive, or unwanted.” However, there are no examples or context for what behavior might be included in these descriptions. If the school finds a violation to be particularly serious, the incident is referred to the dean of students of the division vice president and the student is stripped of network and computer access and privileges.

Speech First members at UCF also credibly fear that the expression of their deeply held views will be considered “biased” and reported to the JKRT, which serves to “act as a clearinghouse for any bias-related incidents that may occur on UCF campuses.”

The school’s response to these accusations can “involve a variety of activities including discussion, mediation, training, counseling and consensus building” - sometimes summoning not only the person who was impacted by the “bias” but the accused students and bystanders too. Failure to participate in these interventions can be considered “disruptive behavior” under the University’s code of conduct.

Speech First president and founder Nicole Neily said: “UCF’s disciplinary measures associated with their bias response team resemble reeducation camps, forcing adult college students to sit through patronizing lectures on which types of speech the university considers acceptable. Unfortunately for the school, the Constitution does not give UCF the authority to judge the content of student speech.”

Speech First has asked for a permanent injunction barring UCF from enforcing the discriminatory harassment and computer use policies and disbanding the unconstitutional JKRT.

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