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SPEECH FIRST

Speech First Files Lawsuit Against Oklahoma State University for Bias Reporting System, Harassment Policies, and Computer Policies

Washington, D.C. (January 10, 2023) – Speech First filed a complaint against Oklahoma State University (OSU) for violating students’ First and Fourteenth Amendment rights in the United States District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma State University and its officials have created a series of rules and regulations that deter, suppress, and punish speech about political and social issues of the day.

Speech First has challenged three specific policies that have been designed to – and have the effect of – silencing student speech:

- The Bias Reporting System – Enforces speech codes through a reporting mechanism that solicits reports from students for their “bias”. Regulating student speech both on and off campus, including on social media
- The Harassment Policy – is so vague that it can easily be applied to a wide swath of protected speech
- The Computer Policy - forbids students from using their student email accounts for protected political speech

Each of these policies is a vague and overbroad restriction on constitutionally protected speech. Under these policies, students can be disciplined for ambiguously defined “intimidating” speech, discussing politics in emails, commenting in class, or even, in the words of the University, for showing “a disproportionate weight in favor of or against an idea or thing.” OSU policies pose a grave risk of chilling the open and unfettered discourse that should be central to higher education.

These policies – combined with the fact that OSU has given itself broad authority over activities and speech both on and off campus, as well as on students’ social media and other digital platforms – cause students to credibly fear disciplinary repercussions for anything they say or do anytime, anywhere. Accordingly, students self-censor, missing out on an enriching college experience where ideas are challenged, shared, and vigorously debated.

[Cherise Trump](#), Executive Director of Speech First, issued the following statement:

“Oklahoma State’s policies are clearly designed to monitor, investigate, and restrict student speech all together. The fact that students can’t even express an opinion without worrying that another student can use a campus policy to report on them shows us that the school’s administrators have no interest in protecting students’ rights. These policies not only force students to censor themselves when they interact with one another, but they also put students in the mindset that they *should* be offended by the opinions of others they disagree with, and that by committing the offense of being “bias,” or what most of us may just call “being opinionated,” warrants disciplinary action against you. Universities should focus their efforts on fostering and promoting debate and open discourse, encouraging students to engage with ideas they find challenging. Oklahoma State’s policies have the opposite effect and violate their students’ First Amendment rights .”

To schedule an engagement with Speech First, please contact Michael Hensley at
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