Virtual Learning and Student Speech Rights

VIRTUAL LEARNING AND STUDENT SPEECH RIGHTS

If you're a college student, you may not be on campus at the moment. But while your stumight still be in your dorm room, you haven't left your right to freedom of expression behind as well. The purpose of a college education remains the same. That's why your expressive rights in the virtual classroom should generally mirror those you have when attending class on campus.

Threats to free speech may not always be immediately apparent, and censorship can take many forms, both online and o . Here are some speech-related issues to watch out for as you and your fellow students attend classes remotely:

- Punishment for social media posts: College o cials sometimes try to punish students for
 protected speech over social media, especially when the speech is controversial. Just because
 much of what you would have said to other students in person is now being said online
 doesn't mean that you can be punished or investigated for social media use that is protected
 by the First Amendment. Now that even more student speech is online and easy to record or
 screenshot, students will need to be more vigilant in protecting and asserting their rights.
- Refusals to allow student organization meetings or events: Student groups still have the right to meet and engage in expressive activity online. Universities can't use the pandemic to justify banning online meetings or events organized by student groups or publications, even if they claim to have "shut down" student groups.
- Trans on campaigning: College o cials might move to censor student political expression because of a misguided concern that student speech regarding an election or candidate could jeopardize the school's tax bish (jfor on campa sQ. NolQ. -1emhbQ) If m(eidst if) (0) JO 1974 (0) SQ) And (0) SQ

That means the professor can:

- impose some limits on distractions, such as virtual backgrounds, or ask students to turn o their cameras; and
- limit chats on the side, including classwide and direct messaging.

FIRE is here to help if you think your rights may have been violated.