



Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

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November 20, 2006

President Lou Anna K. Simon
Office of the President
Michigan State University
450 Administration Building
East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

Sent by U.S. Mail and Facsimile (517-355-4670)

Dear President Simon:

As you can see from our Directors and Board of Advisors, FIRE unites civil rights and civil liberties leaders, scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals across the political and ideological spectrum on behalf of liberty, legal equality, due process, the right of conscience, and academic freedom on America's college campuses. Our web page, www.thefire.org, will give you a fuller sense of our identity and activities.

I write to express our grave concern about the threat to the freedoms of speech and conscience—as well as to individual liberty, dignity, and autonomy—posed by MSU's Student Accountability in Community seminars (SAC). The SAC program was designed not only to unconstitutionally police protected speech and to punish students showing signs of aggressiveness, but also compel students to speak about their actions in ways deemed appropriate by administrators in pseudo- psychological mandatory sessions. The SAC program forces students to accept fundamental assumptions with which they might disagree under the threat of expulsion. The seminars are truly chilling to anyone who cares about the sanctity of private conscience; as bad as it may be to tell a citizen what they cannot say, it is still worse to tell them what they *must* say or believe. Such utter disregard for the autonomy and agency of others is the hallmark of totalitarianism and has no place at an institution of higher learning in any free society, let alone a public university in the state of Michigan.

FIRE's concerns about the SAC program are informed by personal experience. I attended the seminar "How to Increase Student Accountability in Your Campus Community" at the Association for Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA)'s International Conference, held in Clearwater, Florida in 2002. Richard Shafer, Holly Rosen, and Peter Hovmand led the seminar. (To be sure that the content I

saw remains representative of the SAC program today, a FIRE intern contacted Mr. Shafer, who assured us that the program has not changed significantly since that time.) Based on first-hand knowledge and primary materials from the 2002 ASJA handout, my notes from that seminar, the SAC Brochure, and a more updated copy of the “parti

The second example, perhaps more disturbing, came when an audience member asked, “How do I deal with people with religious beliefs that ‘justify’ their anger?” Amazingly, Holly Rosen responded that “religious beliefs may be a form of obfuscation.” This was one of many responses that indicated that the hosts of the program seemed to believe that no outright expression of anger or hostility could be justified. This con


incriminate under threat of expulsion, violates both state and federal privacy laws. Simply put, the SAC program is a legal minefield.

To be clear, FIRE is not a litigation organization, and our objection to this program is not solely legalistic. What makes this program so offensive is its utter disregard for autonomy, dignity, and individual conscience. As aggressive as civil liberties watchdogs like FIRE may seem, at the heart of all concepts relating to freedom of the mind is a recognition of our own limitations—like us, those in power are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and therefore have no right to dictate to others what their deepest personal beliefs must be. Concern for free speech and freedom of conscience is rooted in the wisdom of humility and restraint. The SAC program, which presumes to show students the specific ideological assumptions they need to be better people, crosses the boundary from punishment into invasive and immoral thought reform. We can conceive of no way in which the SAC program can be maintained consistent with the ideals of a free society.

We ask nothing less than the immediate and total dismantling of the SAC program.

If MSU wishes to continue its sociological and psychological experiments, it should seek its test subjects elsewhere. FIRE asks for your response by December 11, 2006. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Greg Lukianoff", is written over a yellow rectangular background. A small black square is located at the bottom right corner of the signature area.

Greg Lukianoff
President

cc:

Kim A. Wilcox, Provost, Michigan State University

Robert A. Noto, General Counsel and Vice President for Legal Affairs, Michigan State University

Lee N. June, Vice President for Student Affairs and Services, Michigan State University

Fred L. Poston, Vice President for Finance and Operations, and Treasurer, Michigan State University

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Encl.