

April 6, 2005

President Mark A. Murray
Grand Valley State University
1 Campus Drive
Allendale, Michigan 49401

URGENT

Sent by U.S. Mail and Facsimile (616-331-3503)

Dear President Murray,

As you can see from our Directors and

Furthermore, at least one GVSU administrator is on record suggesting that the real reason that the university is trying the students for their political expression is that some people found it “offensive.” GVSU Director of Student Life Bob Stoll was quoted in a March 25, 2005, article in *The Grand Rapids Press* as saying, “To do something this offensive is not appropriate.” Thankfully, the First Amendment does not permit state officials to punish expression merely because they deem it inappropriate or offensive.

A special function of the university as a whole is to serve as the ultimate forum for free speech. Any university serious about the search for truth should be seeking, at all times, to expand open discourse, to develop intellectual inquiry, and to engage and challenge the way individuals think. By putting the College Republicans on trial for their expression, GVSU sends the message to its students that speech is to be feared, monitored, and ultimately restrained if it is deemed sufficiently controversial or “offensive.” This message stands in stark opposition to the values of higher education. GVSU should remember, at all times, the U.S. Supreme Court’s timeless expression of the important role of our universities in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire* (1957):

The essentiality of freedom in the community of American universities is almost self-evident. No one should underestimate the vital role in a democracy that is played by those who guide and train our youth. **To impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation.** No field of education is so thoroughly comprehended by man that new discoveries cannot yet be made.... Scholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Teachers and students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to

both legally and morally bound. We urge GVSU to cancel the scheduled trial and demonstrate that free speech is to be celebrated, honored, and broadened—not feared, suppressed, and restricted. Let your students exercise their basic legal, moral, and human rights; let them protest as their consciences dictate. Because of the urgency of this matter and the impending trial of the GVSU College Republicans, FIRE requests a response by 5 p.m. EDT on April 7, 2005.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert L. Shibley". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a dark grey rectangular redaction bar.

Robert L. Shibley
Program Officer

cc:

Gayle R. Davis, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Grand Valley State University

Patricia Oldt, Vice President of Planning & Equity and Interim Affirmative Action Director,
Grand Valley State University

Patricia Smith, Associate University Counsel for Complaints of Discrimination and Harassment,
Grand Valley State University

Oliver Wilson, Dean of Multicultural Affairs, Grand Valley State University

Kyle Rausch