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## Joking students called on the carpet

The pair at Colorado College are rebuked over a feminist-newsletter parody seen as threatening.

By Jenel Stelton-Holtmeier  
*The Denver Post*

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A satirical response to a feminist publication at Colorado College has landed the college and two of its students in the middle of a fierce debate over freedom of speech.

Chris Robinson and another student at the Colorado Springs institution decided to print "The Monthly Bag" after seeing copies of a feminist and gender studies newsletter, "The Monthly Rag," in restrooms around campus.

The edition of "The Monthly Rag" that prompted action included an announcement for a talk on feminist pornography, information on gender-bending practices, and a tidbit about a myth involving male castration. According to Robinson, it was representative of what appears every month.

In response, Robinson and a friend created their flier, which provided tips on chainsaw etiquette, detailed a sexual position from Men's Health magazine and provided trivia about a

sniper rifle — what Robinson called information for the stereotypical macho man. Staff members removed The Bag within hours of receiving complaints that the publication was threatening.

"It was a serious concern that this thing was posted anonymously and included in bold print the performance characteristics of a sniper rifle," president Richard Celeste said. "I had to take that as a threat."

The authors appeared before a conduct committee in March and were found guilty of violating the campus conduct code. In lieu of punishment, they were ordered to host a public forum on the issues raised in the incident.

A letter from Mike Edmonds, vice president for student life at Colorado College, to Robinson on March 25 called the problem "the juxtaposition of weaponry and sexuality."

The case gained national attention when the students filed a complaint with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a non-profit organization that works to protect individual rights like free speech on college campuses across the nation.

"We quickly determined this was one of the worst cases of the year," said Adam Kissel, director of FIRE, because the parody publication was singled out. "It's such an obvious double standard. The fact that 'The Monthly Rag' mentions male castration alongside an announcement for a feminist porn activist provides the same juxtaposition they're

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claiming for Robinson of violence and sexuality."

Tomi-Ann Roberts, director of the feminist and gender studies program that publishes "The Monthly Rag," said participants in her program were surprised when this situation arose.

"We were like 'whoa ... wow ... wait.' Obviously, there are some men here on this campus who are very angry at our flier," Roberts said.

The feminist and gender studies program has been publishing The Monthly Rag for about three years.

At the conduct hearing in March, Robinson and other students raised concerns about the offensiveness of The Monthly Rag. Roberts dismissed those complaints.

"There's a difference between material that is 'offensive' ... versus material that demonizes or threatens or belittles groups of people," Roberts said.

According to the letter from Edmonds, Robinson and the other student were found guilty of violating the school's code of conduct, but no sanctions or punishment were implemented. An appeal from the students is in process.

"If we weren't punished what would we have to appeal?" Robinson said. "The whole process was a punishment. I was subjected to an ideological witch hunt and interrogated about my political beliefs beyond what was in the satire."

As a private institution, Colorado College is not bound by the same limitations for controlling speech that public institutions are, Kissel said. However, they have a contractual obligation because they include free speech as a value in the student handbook.

"I have been a staunch defender of free speech on this campus since the day I arrived here," Celeste wrote in a blog published last week. "And I will continue to defend it. But first and foremost, I will do what I can to maintain the safety of this campus."

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