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Rights group tells MSU to improve

University could be listed for not aiding free speech

By [KRISTI JOURDAN](#)

The State News

Officials at a national First Amendment organization say they could list MSU as a place where constitutional speech isn't protected — unless the university responds satisfactorily to their demands.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, wants MSU to dismantle a disciplinary seminar it says stifles students' constitutional rights.

The possible placement on the list "sounds to me like a threat," said Lee June, MSU's vice president for Student Affairs and Services. After the group's initial criticism of the Student Accountability in Community Seminar in February, June conducted a formal review.

"We examine programs for their educational value and the rights to the individual, not on the basis of what someone dictates to us," June said. "We don't make decisions on those kinds of bases."

FIRE has not created the list, said Greg Lukianoff, president of FIRE. But he said the group is considering the option.

"We'll continue pressure on MSU until the reforms have been made or the program has been ended," Lukianoff said. "If MSU intends to make those changes or has made them, they should say so."

In late March, FIRE officials sent a letter to June's office, giving the university an April 18 deadline to respond to their demands.

So far, June hasn't officially responded.

"We don't believe the program is operating in such a way that it should be dismantled, although we are making some modifications," June said.

He said he would not go into "too much detail" about those modifications.

It is unclear whether the Student Accountability in Community Seminar is an optional punishment for students found violating university regulations. The seminar, which is not currently in effect, has been described as an early intervention program used to dissuade students from using power and control in their interactions with fellow students.

FIRE officials have called the seminar a form of thought control. In his letter to June, Lukianoff said he doesn't understand whether a student's referral to the program is "truly optional."

"Parents and future students need to know what schools protect their rights and those who don't," he said.

The reason the program is not currently in effect is because its facilitator left for another job, said Rick Shafer, Student Life's associate director.

"It is our intent to continue the program when we can identify a person to take the lead," he said.

"The judicial process is supposed to be about education, not about thought reform. I will categorically deny that the program is about thought reform."

Lukianoff said creating a list is not FIRE's "only approach to dealing with this.

"But at the same time, MSU has shown a willingness to work on this," he added. "We hope that will continue, to bring the policy in line with the Constitution."

Student Life describes the seminar on its Web site, but does not mention it as an optional program. The site says students could have a hold placed on their accounts if they fail to pay the initial \$50 fee and the

additional \$10 charge for missing a program session.

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