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Tentative resolution reached in free speech lawsuit

By Jonathan Montalvo

Faced with a recent lawsuit over the campus free speech area regulations, administrators at Citrus College have agreed to a settlement with 20-year-old student activist Chris Stevens.

Under the compromise, the college's insurance carrier will pay Stevens' legal fees totally, \$24,500. College officials have also agreed to suspend campus regulations on free speech areas and work to formulate a policy conducive to free speech.

Stevens originally filed the lawsuit against Citrus College on May 20. He alleged that college regulations designating free speech areas violated freedom of speech by restricting free speech to only three locations. He argued that his first amendment rights were being infringed upon.

The free speech areas consisted of the area around the centrally located Owl fountain and each end of the campus.

According to the now rescinded policy, demonstrators had to remain within the confines of the designated campus areas. Stevens said that those regulations did not allow him to express himself freely.

Stevens was made aware of the regulations after he was told he could not hold a pro-America rally with supporters marching through the campus.

"We immediately recognized a problem area for the school," Stevens said. "Free speech is something that can't be censored."

With help from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), an organization with which he had developed a relationship this past spring, he then wrote a seven-page letter to former Superintendent/President Dr. Louis E. Zellers. The letter highlighted legal issues and asked Zellers to abandon the policy until the problem could be further investigated.

"He never even responded," Stevens said.

Stevens then attended a board of trustees meeting and informed the members that the issue, if ignored, would become a legal matter. No action was taken and many people came forward to support the policy, including Dr. Arnold Rollin, associate dean of students, and Ruben Hoyos Jr., president of the Associated Students of Citrus College.

Stevens subsequently decided to take action on what he believed to be an unconstitutional restriction, he said. He proceeded to file a lawsuit against the college.

After about three months of litigation, the college trustees suspended the restrictions for the time being.

"Rather than go through the whole routine we decided to rescind it," Rollin said.

"Quite frankly we thought what we had in place was (fair)," Rollin said. "I've been in consultation with our attorneys several times about it, and they said that we were okay."

Rollin researched other schools' regulations when drafting the newly rescinded policy.

"I requested and received (about) six different policies," all of which were very similar to Citrus' regulations, said Rollin.

Rollin defends the concept of free speech areas.

"We have to be concerned with the students who are getting educations," he said. "If there were no restrictions then it would be total chaos."

The student services committee will begin work in September on drafting a new policy.

A sub-committee will be formed to move the process along a bit quicker.

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WEEKLY POLL
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- No school!
- The warm beach weather
- More time for work
- More time to master computer games
- No summer Clarion issues

Many faculty members that could be valuable in discussions of the free speech topic have been asked to join the committee and more volunteers are being assembled. Students are also represented on the committee.

"Dr. Viera (superintendent/president of Citrus College) would like us to get the new policy recommended to the board by the end of the fall semester," Dr. Jeanne Hamilton, vice president of student services.

"The committee wants to back up and do another review of what the concerns were that Chris and FIRE expressed," Hamilton said. "We want to take a look at what adjustments should be made or not and have another good solid look at it."

Stevens remains a bit skeptical about a policy revision.

"It's difficult to comprehend why the school is deciding to draft another policy. There is just no need," Stevens said.

"The problem is they are going to formulate a new policy through the same channels that created the old policy," he said.

"I hope that the student committees that make the policy are mindful of the lawsuit because I made it clear that if they make a policy that restricts free speech in any way I will not hesitate to file another lawsuit," he said.

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