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Article Published: Tuesday, March 02, 2004 - 4:03:06 PM PST

Free speech by the decibel?

CITRUS College's new free speech policy may be light years from its original that restricted political speech, rallies, etc. to specific areas of campus, but it's still not the free speech we're guaranteed in the Constitution and will likely be challenged if not in the courts, then by those students seeking to make a statement.

The new "Expressive Activities Policy and Regulation" was spurred by a lawsuit filed by student Chris Stevens over the old policy that designated certain "free-speech areas" at the 12,000-student college in Glendora.

While we support the college's ability to maintain civil order in the midst of civil disobedience if property or people are endangered, testing the decibel range of demonstrations is not only ludicrous but the level set to test whether the demonstration is "disruptive" isn't that the point? is 60 decibels (dbA). That's not even a decent yell.

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Consider that conversation is a paltry 55 dbA and you get an idea of just how quietly the college wants those assemblages to be. Mimes holding placards, perhaps?

Certainly 60 dbA, which the college will monitor with a decibel meter, would preclude using a microphone or bullhorn.

With most household noise sans blenders (80 dbA) or vacuums (70 dbA) hitting 50 dbA, it seems the college has gone a bit overboard. And if 61 dbA constitutes a disturbance at the college, what about leaf blowers (65 dbA) and power mowers (90 dbA)?

Seems to us the 60 dbA cap is a case of appearing to allow free speech while actually keeping a lid on any demonstration that might actually be a call to action such as marching on the administration building, say, to protest the new speech policy.

You'd think exercising free speech would be par for the political science, debate and government courses. Isn't that part of higher learning? Critical thinking?

Clearly, Stevens got some folks' attention far beyond the San Gabriel Valley. The nonprofit FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education), out of that freedom-loving city, Philadelphia, took particular note of the Citrus lawsuit and its outcome. The group has drafted a resolution that states, "policies, rules and procedures that are vague and overbroad in limiting student expression are unconstitutional." While there's no mention of decibel level, we'd say Citrus' decibel metering is as limiting as stand-here- to-say-that rules and designed to have a chilling effect on free speech.

Well, there's always the written word quiet, compelling and easily disseminated throughout a campus by pamphlets thousands and thousands of them.

We can be grateful the British are no longer coming as other than tourists, anyway. At least not via Citrus College. Otherwise, who would know?

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