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UNC-Chapel Hill appears once again to have steered into the treacherous waters where free speech, religion and political correctness collide.

To its credit, it also appears to be paddling furiously in an effort to get out of those waters.

A recent flap at the state's most prominent public university over a requirement for freshmen to read a book called "Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations" had barely died down when the latest controversy hit. This time, trouble arose when a university administrator sent a letter to the campus InterVarsity Christian Fellowship saying the group's charter was in violation of university requirements that all student groups allow "openness to full membership and participation without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender (where applicable)." In essence, the Christian group was told it would lose funding and recognition unless it changed its rules, which require its leaders to adhere to Christian doctrines. The fireworks flew immediately. A Philadelphia-based civil liberties group that is taking Rutgers University to court over the same issue said it was ready to challenge UNC-CH as well.

Thor Halvorssen, chief executive officer of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, said "That letter is chilling. That letter is basically saying to a Christian group: 'You can't be Christian.'"

He's right. Beyond freedom of religion, one of the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, we appear to have a case trampling freedom of speech and association to boot.

Halvorssen characterized the issue as a "slam-dunk First Amendment case."

It shouldn't come to that. The UNC-CH vice chancellor for student affairs, Dean L. Bresciani, told the Associated Press that the school would work with InterVarsity to put the issue to rest. "We have no intention of kicking the group off campus, and we're prepared to work very hard to avoid that scenario. We're feeling confident we can find some solution. We just have to find a way to get around the legal hurdle."

That hurdle isn't very high. After all, you'd expect people leading Christian student organizations to follow Christian teachings, much as you'd expect students leading Muslim student organizations to follow the teachings of Islam or students leading seven-foot-tall student organizations to at least think

they're seven feet tall.

Such things go with the territory.

This is a fight that doesn't have to go to court. Here's hoping for a quick and sensible resolution.