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Critics of Political Correctness Rise to Defense of Student Who Used Racial Analogy

By [NINA WILLDORF](#)

Saint Cloud State University administrators' rebuke of a student for making an analogy that referred to race has critics of campus political correctness crying foul.

In December, Christopher Monson, a junior at the university, was quoted in the campus newspaper, the *University Chronicle*, as saying that refusing to give credit-card companies free and full access to the campus would be similar to "not allowing blacks on campus." Mr. Monson, the student-services chairman of Saint Cloud State's student government, had been preparing resolutions for the student government to consider on how to deal with complaints from students about an excessive presence of solicitors.

Mr. Monson's comment drew ire from many people on the campus, including President Suzanne R. Williams. "The University finds the statement -- intentional or not -- to be demeaning and totally inappropriate. We are looking into the quote to determine the circumstances, and to take whatever action is necessary to stem racial insults such as these," Ms. Williams wrote in a universitywide e-mail message.

According to Mr. Monson, Ms. Williams "strongly recommended" that he attend diversity training, and the

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president of the student government suggested that he could be fired from his position. Mr. Monson discussed the matter with officials of the university's Multicultural Student Services office, but he said he still believes that administrators overreacted.

"My point was to prove that it's not good to ban any specific group," he said. "Reading the article closely, you could figure that out, but just glancing at it, it looked bad." Mr. Monson concedes that he may have chosen the "wrong words," but he maintains that "the analogy would have been fine if I had worded it better."

Now, several months later, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education and the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, two nonprofit groups that say they are dedicated to educational freedom and free speech, are saying that Mr. Monson's First Amendment rights were violated, even though he was never formally disciplined. The president of the foundation, Alan Charles Kors, a history professor at the University of Pennsylvania, learned of the incident while speaking at Saint Cloud State this month.

In a statement released last week by the foundation, Mr. Kors said: "It is bad enough to have a university president unable to follow the simple logic of a benign analogy. It is a scandal, however, that the president of a public university, an institution bound by the First Amendment to the state and federal constitutions, neither recognizes nor respects her clearest obligations to the rule of law, including the essential rights of freedom of speech and of the press."

Calling Mr. Monson's remarks "utterly innocent," the American Council of Trustees and Alumni asked the president to apologize to the student and "rescind the punishment."

However, Gail M. Olson, the general counsel for Minnesota State Colleges & Universities, insisted in a letter to the Council of Trustees and Alumni on Tuesday that Mr. Monson was never formally punished. "There has been no abridgement of any student's free speech, and Saint Cloud State University will continue

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to rigorously defend all aspects of academic freedom on its campus," the letter stated.

Marsha Shoemaker, a spokeswoman for the university, further cautioned that it would be "unfortunate if Mr. Monson became a pawn because a conservative organization decided to take it up as their cause."

Mr. Monson was unaware, until a *Chronicle of Higher Education* reporter called, that the two groups had risen to defend his free-speech rights.



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