

Today's News

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Citrus College Dodges Court Date by Dropping Speech Code

By [ELIZABETH CRAWFORD](#)

A day before Citrus College was to appear in court last week to defend its speech code against a student's claim that it violated his First Amendment rights, the California community college repealed its code, ending the litigation. The decision signaled the first victory for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education in its new campaign to do away with such codes at public universities.

Christopher Stevens, a 20-year-old student at Citrus College, had teamed up with FIRE, a nonprofit foundation devoted to free speech on college campuses, for legal support after he said the college refused to let him conduct a "pro-America rally" outside of designated free-speech zones unless he did so as part of a registered club.

Mr. Stevens and FIRE contended that it was unconstitutional for the college to confine protests and rallies to the free-speech areas, which FIRE representatives said were on the fringes of campus. They filed a lawsuit against the college on May 20.

Michelle C. Small, director of publications and student recruitment at Citrus College, said that the main free-speech zone is in the middle of campus in the main quad. She said that even though no particular event prompted the college to adopt the free-speech-zone policies, they went into effect a year ago to protect students who wanted to continue going to class, uninterrupted, in the event that a large-scale protest took place.

Nonetheless, last Thursday, a day before the initial court appearance in the case, the college rescinded the

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speech-related policies that Mr. Stevens and FIRE were calling into question. Ms. Small said that the college commission would look at the policies in the fall when students and faculty members returned to campus. They will then create a board to evaluate whether the policies should be dispensed with or revised.

"I think we were surprised when the suit was filed," Ms. Small said. "I think that it's good though, if there are concerns, to evaluate what you are doing."

FIRE began its campaign in April in a lawsuit filed against Shippensburg University, in Pennsylvania. The group's strategy is to sue public colleges across the country until it has ensured solid rulings against speech codes in each of the 12 federal appellate circuits.

The group plans to sue another college within the week, although Thor L. Halvorsen, FIRE's executive director, would not name the institution or specify its appellate circuit.

Background article from *The Chronicle*:

- [War of Words](#) (5/23/2003)



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