

## Culture

### Cal Poly Defends Free Speech Policy Amid Dispute With White Student

By David Fein  
CNSNews.com Correspondent  
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(CNSNews.com) - The involvement of university administrators in a campus dispute at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo is getting "more and more outrageous every day," according to the white student who was ordered to apologize for posting a flyer at the school's multicultural center.

Following a recent barrage of news reports about the dispute between student Steve Hinkle and Cal Poly administrators, including a July 10 report by CNSNews.com, university officials posted a new message on their Internet site, claiming that "the university strives to create and maintain a campus environment that supports free speech and open inquiry for all."

The flyer, which Hinkle posted Nov. 12, 2002, advertised the Nov. 14 speech of black conservative Mason Weaver. Weaver's book, *It's OK to Leave the Plantation*, urges African-Americans to move away from government dependency.

However, after posting the flyer, Hinkle was confronted by several students who told Hinkle school officials needed to approve the posting of any material at the multicultural center. The angry students also called campus police.

Initially labeled a "suspicious white male" by officers investigating the disturbance, Hinkle was charged by the university this past January with disrupting a campus event - a Bible reading - in posting the flyer. In March, school administrators ordered Hinkle to apologize, or face other disciplinary action. Hinkle refused.

Still caught in a stalemate with the university, Hinkle told CNSNews.com this week that, "the idea that I was in the wrong because I didn't expect these students to get upset at me is ridiculous."

Hinkle is being represented by the Philadelphia-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a group focused on the protection of free speech.

FIRE noted in defense of Hinkle that the bulletin board he used to post the flyer was in a public student lounge area, that the Bible study had not been officially recognized as a campus event and that no notice of any kind had been given for the meeting.

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The free speech group also emphasized that the flyer only contained the title of Weaver's book, a photograph of the author, and the time and location of his speech.

Hinkle added that it's time Cal Poly President Warren Baker began taking "a good hard look at what's going on at his university and at the type of people he's allowing to affect the careers of students."

Baker has "totally ignored something that's an obvious problem and it's a shame," Hinkle charged.

Officials of the San Luis Obispo campus, however, see the matter in a different light, defending their policies in the new message on the university's website. "This campus does not practice censorship of thought or word, or impose bans on speech or expression," the statement reads. The message went on to cite the speech by Mason Weaver as an example of the diversity of thought found on campus.

Hinkle said he remains skeptical about the true intentions of the Cal Poly administration.

"I think these professors are kind of in a bubble...they're in this academia, PC (politically correct) bubble and it's causing them to not realize what they're doing when they're censoring me, and I think in an effort to be PC, they're sort of stepping on the toes of students' rights," Hinkle said.

Hinkle added that he is finding sympathy from other students on campus. "I think on campus a lot of students were shocked that their university was doing this and embarrassed that their university would put another student through this."

In a university statement issued to FIRE, Carlos Cordova, Cal Poly's legal counsel, defended the university's handling of the matter.

"Mr. Hinkle was charged with engaging in conduct which disrupted a student meeting, a content-neutral rule applicable to all students. He was not charged because of his political affiliation or because some members of our campus community considered the flyers he attempted to post to be offensive."

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