

6 MONTHS OF HOME DELIVERY FOR
\$1 PER WEEK



Wisconsin
SUN

madison.com

Classifieds | Jobs | Autos | Homes | Rentals | Merchandise

Search: Calendar for:

THU., MAR 9, 2006



Wisconsin State Journal



Current: 35°F
FULL FORECAST

FRONT PAGE LOCAL SPORTS OPINION COLUMNS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS ||

LOCAL

E-MAIL STORY PRINT STORY

MON., MAR 6, 2006 - 12:34 AM

UW System plan pleases religious group

GEORGE HESSELBERG 608-252-6140
ghesselberg@madison.com

A Christian group active on campuses and a student representative of religious workers in Madison responded positively last week to news that the University of Wisconsin System proposes to give dormitory advisers the same rights as fellow students.

"We welcome the recommendation that will permit residence advisers to practice their faith and study the Bible with their friends in their dormitories," said Tony Arnold, a spokesman for the Campus Crusade for Christ.

System officials have said a written policy will be proposed to the UW Board of Regents this week.

JOIN THE FORUM

It's easy!
Post your views or read others' opinions

The policy was created after RAs - who are paid a stipend and lodging for supervising dormitories - at UW-Eau Claire were told they couldn't lead Bible study classes in their rooms or dorms. One RA protested, and a federal lawsuit

was filed against the System and the Regents last fall by the Alliance Defense Fund.

The RA, Lance Steiger, is a member of the Campus Crusade for Christ, which has about 55,000 active student participants on 1,300 campuses.

"We are not a party to the lawsuit. We welcome the university's recommendation," said Arnold, adding that the group has not experienced similar problems at any other campus.

The recommendation would have the System's campuses establish a written policy and a process to address complaints if a student feels an RA used the position to "inappropriately influence, pressure, or coerce student residents to attend or participate."

Few of the campuses had written policies in place, said Doug Bradley, a System spokesman. UW-Madison has one that, similar to the unwritten Eau Claire policy, doesn't allow RAs to lead such meetings in their own dorms.

Often challenged Kathryn Lease, a UW-Madison junior and contact person for the Friends of University Religious Workers, said Thursday that she welcomes the change.

OTHER STORIES

- Report: Juvenile system is broken
- Changes to proposed sick leave law offered
- Rio is pumped
- Using wireless Internet of others easier

ADVERTISEMENT

get a free
Men's Facts Kit
at mensfacts.com

RE

DEM

Loo
Wis
Rea
wee
4:00

We'
choi
from
May
to P
vote
the :

Wi

"We get challenged all the time, especially since the Eau Claire thing happened," she said.

She said the group is "one of the biggest groups on campus," and includes students of all religions. The recommended policy "will obviously be great for us. We have Bible studies going on all the time in dorms and we have for quite a while," she said.

"We don't have many (RAs) leading Bible studies because, well, they're always so busy doing the (RA) thing," she said. "But just being able to teach in the dorms is huge. There are so many students who like the Bible studies."

Christopher Hallquist, a freshman and spokesman for a smaller campus group, the Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics at UW-Madison, said his main thought on the original issue was that "the students there were just being asked (to) follow a rule that applies to all political groups, and that is that there be no political or religious activities in the dormitories by the resident assistants."

One of Steiger's complaints was that the unwritten rule was not uniformly enforced.

"Whatever the rules are," said Hallquist, "they should be the same rules for everybody."

He said his group, described as "humanist, irreligious or skeptical students" was in its first year on campus.

'Private sphere' Another group active in the Eau Claire case is the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which was contacted by Steiger when university officials told him to stop leading the meetings. The group's interim president, Greg Lukianoff, suggested that the controversy's effect was not limited to religious freedom.

"Everyone should be concerned about it. Though it has to do with one group of religious students, students not of that faith should also agree with it. The argument here is that the resident assistant should be treated with dignity and should be allowed to have a private sphere," he said.

He said that "the most insulting thing" about the Eau Claire case was that university officials assumed that because the RA was Christian, "that would make him unapproachable to other students."

The group is not part of the lawsuit, though it directed Steiger to the Alliance Defense Fund.

Lawsuit's demands The lawsuit asks that the policy enforced against Steiger be declared unconstitutional because it violates the constitutional freedoms of speech, association, due process, equal protection and religion. It asks for an order, nominal damages and legal expenses.

Alliance Defense Fund lawyer Kevin Theriot said Friday three things have to happen for the lawsuit to be settled.

"The Regents have to adopt (the policy), we have to see it in its final form and we have to know what the Eau Claire campus is going to do," he said. "Are they going to mandate that all of the campuses have the same policy? If so, this will go along way toward fixing it."

"I am very optimistic that if this goes through as written the matter will be resolved," he added.

A Regents committee will consider the policy Thursday and recommend action to the Regents at a meeting Friday.

• Ch
sick
• Us
of ot
• Re
is br
• Or:
cont
• Ric

• Gu
pape
• Re
• E-1



Copyright © 2005 Wisconsin State Journal

For comments about this site, contact Anju Ali, interactive editor, aali@madison.com

For comments about news coverage in the local section, contact Teryl Franklin, city editor, tfranklin@madis