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THE STATE

Cal Poly Settles Suit by Student

■ He says the San Luis Obispo campus suppressed his right to free speech.

By Jean-Paul Renaud, Times Staff Writer

A Cal Poly San Luis Obispo student who sued the school for allegedly violating his 1st Amendment rights reached a settlement with the university this week. The school promised to expunge Steve Hinkle's disciplinary record and to pay \$40,000 in legal fees.

Hinkle, a 23-year-old industrial technology major, was reprimanded in November 2002 after several students complained that fliers he had posted in the school's multicultural center were offensive.

Hinkle, president of the Cal Poly College Republican Club, was advertising a speech by Mason Weaver, the author of "It's OK to Leave the Plantation."

Weaver argues that reliance on government aid enslaves blacks.

The Cal Poly Judicial Affairs Office, after a seven-hour hearing in February 2003, found Hinkle guilty of "disruption of a campus event," after several students said the fliers distracted them from a meeting, Hinkle said.

The school had ordered Hinkle to submit a written apology to the offended students. Hinkle refused, saying his constitutional right to free speech was suppressed.

He contacted the Brooklyn-based Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which filed a lawsuit against Cal Poly.

"He didn't do anything wrong, period, ever," said Greg Lukianoff, director of Legal and Public Advocacy. "It's not like the university didn't have the right to an opinion. If they thought that was offensive, they're free to say that."

The student, now in the school's graduate program, said he was glad the fight was over.

"If they've shown any intelligence throughout this process, it's that they settled with me," Hinkle said.

"I'm glad this is over so I can actually concentrate on school. I can go back to hanging up fliers and being more active. I would absolutely do it again."

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