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National group faults Le Moyne

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By John Mariani
Staff writer

A national nonprofit group that promotes academic freedom has come to the aid of Scott McConnell, the graduate student denied admission by Le Moyne College last month for opinions he expressed in a term paper, and Ward Churchill, whose scheduled appearance at Hamilton College ignited a firestorm over his post-9/11 writings.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education on Tuesday released its recent exchange of letters with Le Moyne officials in McConnell's behalf. The purpose, said Greg Lukianoff, FIRE's director of legal and public advocacy, is to draw attention that will force Le Moyne to address McConnell's case and reinstate him.

Last fall, McConnell, a non-matriculated education graduate student, advocated corporal punishment and rejected multicultural education in a "Classroom Management Plan" that he wrote for a course. He got an A-minus on the paper. But in January, Le Moyne officials, citing a "mismatch" between McConnell's personal beliefs and Le Moyne's goals, asked him not to return to campus.

The action contradicted the Constitution's free-speech protections, American Association of University Professors ethics guidelines and the college's own handbook, Lukianoff wrote to Rev. Charles Beirne, Le Moyne's president.

"It shows an incredible lack of faith in their own ideals," Lukianoff said in an interview.

The college, in a letter Feb. 8, said it would not "enter a public debate" with FIRE on McConnell's case. Le Moyne spokesman Joe Della Posta declined to comment Tuesday.

While Le Moyne chose not to talk, the media chose to listen: McConnell said he had been contacted by The New York Times and ABC News since FIRE's statement went out Tuesday morning.

FIRE was founded in 1999 by Boston civil rights lawyer Harvey A. Silverglate and University of Pennsylvania history professor Alan Charles Kors, a year after they published "The Shadow University," a book exploring political oppression on university campuses.

The group's action Tuesday came less than a week after Lukianoff urged officials at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where Churchill is a professor, to uphold the free-speech rights of all students and professors.

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