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Mother Superior State College Jumped the Gun Images*

[Nick Gillespie](#) | April 10, 2008, 10:11am

Over at [Inside Higher Ed](#), a publication that covers post-K-12 education issues with vim, vigor, and verve, Andy Guess reports on the case of Robert Crandall, a tenured prof at Lake Superior State College who has gotten in trouble for posting offensive content to his office door. LSSC's case, according to a lawyer representing the school, is that the prof has "acted in an unprofessional and insubordinate manner [and] his actions cannot be considered protected speech."

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ([FIRE](#)), co-founded by **reason** contributors [Harvey Silverglate](#) and [Alan Charles Kors](#), is publicizing the case. Writes Guess:

The first complaints date back to 2005, and the professor, Richard Crandall, was ordered to remove the materials from his door in 2007 (he eventually complied). [Items included](#) a photo of Ronald Reagan, pictures mocking Hillary Clinton, a sign posting a "Notice of the Weekly Meeting of the White, Male, Heterosexual Faculty and Staff Association (WMHFSA)," and various cartoons about abortion, Islamic terrorism and other topics. One depicts two hooded women looking over a photo album. One says, "And that's my youngest son, Hakim. He'll be martyring in the fall." The other replies, "They blow up so fast."



The university argues that the postings contribute to a hostile environment and therefore do not fall under First Amendment protections, although such arguments have not fared well historically in the courts. No lawsuit has been filed, but in the past some professors whose cases have been publicized by FIRE have pursued legal action. The university did not respond to requests for comment.

FIRE and Crandall, who could not be reached for comment, point out that [other professors at the university](#) are able to post politically charged pictures and phrases on their doors without consequence, presumably because their perspective is liberal or leftist rather than conservative or right-wing.

[More here.](#)

Take a [look at the images](#) and I think there's a strong implicit case that Crandall is a tool. Some are funny (IMO), some are not, but if I were an undergrad, they'd definitely kind of freak my shit—as did any number of door and office postings by lefty profs back in the day. But general freakage of shit does not seem not to be the issue here, as it really does appear to be the specific content—right-wing, and heavy on the pro-gun, anti-abortion themes—that is cause for complaint.

FIRE has always made a consistent argument (and has defended scholars and the right and the left) that public universities, precisely because they are government-sponsored, are totally bound by the First Amendment in ways that private universities are not necessarily (yeah, yeah, I understand that the line between public and private is totally nebulous given various funding issues ranging from federal research grants to Pell grants, etc).

I agree with that argument, and think that Crandall and all profs should be allowed to put whatever they want on their doors. Indeed, the whole point of going to college may be to expose kids to hostile environments—or, rather, intellectual environments in which they are exposed to all sorts of perspectives and taught to think critically about every aspect of their lives.

And yet, given the quality of political discourse (right, left, center) on most campuses, I think I may also want to live in a world where students and professors only meet in open areas devoid of any individualized signage, sort of like where prisoners and visitors meet. Plexiglass dividing walls optional.

[*]: I apologize in advance for this title, which is every bit as tortured as the inmates of Abu Ghraib.
