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## News

### Ivies confront free speech uproar

Wright commits to open speech at Dartmouth

BY REBEKAH ROMBOM, THE DARTMOUTH STAFF

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President James Wright signed a letter last week encouraging colleges and universities to become involved in the Ford Foundation's new program encouraging academic freedom, entitled "Difficult Dialogues: Promoting Pluralism and Academic Freedom on Campus."

The College, however, is still rated poorly in terms of freedom of speech, according to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, an organization that champions free speech on university campuses.

The Ford Foundation program, according to the foundation's website, "will support the development of rigorous academic programs that engage students in constructive dialogue around difficult political, religious, racial and cultural issues." The program will provide about 25 grants of up to \$100,000 for programs "with an emphasis on teaching and learning," according to the site. The programs will aim to facilitate open conversation on issues including the war in Iraq and violence in the Middle East.

Though President Wright said that he does not yet know whether Dartmouth will apply for a Ford grant, he is enthusiastic about the program.

"I applaud [the Ford Foundation] for bringing forward this project and I was happy to encourage it," Wright said.

"I think that right now there's just so much conversation in this country about academic freedom. There are tensions on this campus," he said. "We have to be careful that we're not intimidating points of view."

Wright also addressed academic freedom issues in his September 21, 2004 convocation speech, making statements that trustee T.J. Rodgers strongly supported. Following Wright's convocation speech, Rodgers petitioned FIRE to improve Dartmouth's freedom of speech rating from its red status. According to FIRE's website, "a red light university has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech."

To support their assessment of free speech at the College the organization cites, among other statements by Wright, a 2001 letter that condemns Zeta Psi fraternity for pamphlets containing derogatory written statements about female members of the Dartmouth community.

"In a community such as ours, one that depends so much upon mutual trust and

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respect, it is hard to understand why someone would still insist that their 'right' to do what they want trumps the rights, feelings and considerations of others," Wright stated in the letter.

FIRE maintains that the College's "red" rating will not be reduced until Wright formally retracts his statement.

Wright, however, stands by the assertions in the letter, and did not relate them to his support of the Ford Foundation's new program. "I stand by the statements that this is a community where we value each member...free speech does not mean that you're free from criticism for what it is that you said," Wright maintained in an interview with The Dartmouth. "I'm not aware of anyone [here] that thinks they can't speak freely."



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