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## News

### Free speech org. lauds College policies

BY REBEKAH ROMBOM, THE DARTMOUTH STAFF

Published on Tuesday, May 10, 2005

David French, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, said yesterday that the organization would improve Dartmouth's free speech rating from a poor "red light" to the highest rating, a "green light."

FIRE, a self-declared watchdog group that rates and advocates for free speech on campus, accords its highest ranking to 25 to 30 percent of colleges and universities nationwide, according to French. Dartmouth will join the University of Pennsylvania as the second Ivy League school with a green light rating.



Courtesy of www.thefire.org

An advocacy group praised the College's speech policies Monday.

The higher rating results from a number of efforts on the College's part to support free speech on campus, but the removal of two letters from the College's website is what most clearly spurred the initiative.

"Under no stretch of the imagination could we say that Dartmouth has a speech code now," French said.

The letters were written in response to the derecognition of Zeta Psi fraternity in May 2001 after several of Zeta's internal newsletters included remarks highly disparaging to specific women.

French said that the removal of the two letters, in addition to College General Counsel Bob Donin's op-ed in The Dartmouth ("Free Speech and its Limits," April 18) and Wright's statements encouraging free speech during this year's convocation, prompted the organization to ask for clarification about Dartmouth's speech policies.

Donin said that the College's poor rating was more the result of a misunderstanding than an official College policy.

"The recognition is new. It shouldn't have been new, but there was a misunderstanding," Donin said. Still, he said that the College is glad that FIRE is improving its rating.

"We are pleased that FIRE has now recognized the College's long-standing

commitment to freedom of expression," he said.

FIRE initially viewed the letters and their presence on the website for several years as representative of College policy; however, Donin said that the letters were there due to an oversight and were not meant to remain on the website for any length of time.

He further stated in his op-ed last month that the sentiments expressed in the letters were the authors' opinions regarding a specific event and were not representative of any College policy.

Donin said that "based on the position that FIRE was asserting, it was clear that the letters were causing confusion about the College's policy."

Donin maintained that the views expressed in the two letters did not amount to College policy in response to a letter that French wrote to the College on April 19.

"A policy is something that is an operating regulation that other individuals can rely on both to regulate their own behavior and to file complaints," French said.

"There's nothing that we have seen in the policies that would give anyone any pause for speaking their mind," he added, noting that the only exceptions are those forms of speech not allowed under the first amendment.

Both Wright and Larimore still stand behind their statements regarding the actions of Zete brothers in their letters supporting Zete's derecognition after derogatory and allegedly defamatory remarks appeared in that fraternity's newsletter.



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