



## Squelching of Campus Viewpoints Violates 1st Amendment, Group Says

By Jim Brown  
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(AgapePress) - A civil-liberties group says the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire is censoring the political and religious expression of students. That action, says the group, defies the First Amendment.

The Student Senate at UW-Eau Claire recently decided to bar the use of student fees to fund any student-organized activity that promotes a "particular ideological, religious, or partisan viewpoint." In that March 2005 action, the student government amended the school's "Organized Activity Funding Policy," and placed that policy directly at odds with federal law and rulings in Supreme Court cases such as *Rosenberger v. University of Virginia* (1995) and *Board of Regents v. Southworth* (2000).

David French, president of the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE), says UWEC is engaging in viewpoint discrimination against groups like Campus Crusade for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

"It would impact any political and religious club. What it would not impact would be, say, a cultural club like an African-American student group, [or] a gay-lesbian student group, because under their definition, those [groups] are not ideological or political or religious," the FIRE spokesman explains.

According to French, that constitutes an obvious imbalance. "Of course, those groups have a point of view," he notes, "but because they don't fit within the narrow definitions of the point of view for the exclusions defined by the student government, they can still get funding."

After FIRE wrote a letter to the university protesting the new policy, UWEC officials initially gave FIRE a non-answer -- and then later vowed to comply with all First Amendment obligations and governing case law. French says it remains to be seen what action UWEC will take.

"By shutting down political speech and religious speech, they don't shut down other kinds of speech -- such as cultural, for example -- that have a direct bearing on the issues of the day," he says. "So they're stifling some kinds of viewpoints and not others, really in an effort to avoid controversial viewpoints."

French contends the university should be allowing controversial viewpoints and all voices to be heard. He adds that UWEC officials must recognize they cannot delegate their constitutional responsibilities to the student government.

FIRE's director of legal and public advocacy, Greg Lukianoff, says his organization has seen this scenario before. "In the past few years, FIRE has seen a disturbing trend in which students and administrators seem willing to restrict all expression rather than contend with a single point of view they dislike," he states. "As long as students harbor such a clear hostility to the marketplace of ideas, free speech is in serious jeopardy."

Lukianoff adds that, in his opinion, it is "astounding and absurd" that a student government would adopt the stance that it is a bad thing for a student group to have a point of view.

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Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for [American Family Radio News](#), which can be heard online.

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