

UW's Extension of RA-Led Bible Study Ban Draws FIRE's Protest

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire has asked the state Attorney General if it can constitutionally ban resident assistants, or RAs, from leading Bible studies in their dormitory rooms. Controversy erupted after university officials sent out a letter warning RAs they would face disciplinary action if they continued leading Bible studies; and now the school is under fire for broadening the ban to exclude other activities as well.

A civil rights watchdog group, the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE), called on UW-Eau Claire to drop the original ban. After facing a storm of national media attention and public outcry, the university responded by telling the group that it does now prohibit and always has prohibited RAs from "leading, organizing, or recruiting students for student organizations or activities within the halls they work."

However, FIRE's legal director, Greg Lukianoff, says that claim is clearly false. "Part of the job description of RAs at Eau Claire is that they lead and organize floor events," he contends, "and some of those activities are pretty much inarguably political."

In fact, Lukianoff says his organization has already uncovered and reported an example, a case where an RA at the university "organized a showing of *The Vagina Monologues*, a play that some students might consider controversial." Obviously, he asserts, the university's claim that RAs are banned from organizing any activities is a "post hoc rationalization" of its attempt to engage in viewpoint discrimination against religious expression.

The school's original Bible study ban "would never have survived constitutional analysis in a million years," the FIRE spokesman insists. He says, "I think one of the most important issues here, outside of the legal one, is should RAs have rights outside of their jobs?"

"To be a resident assistant," Lukianoff continues, "do you have to give up, now, not just the practice of your own faith privately on your own time in your own room -- but do you also have to give up any kind of political activity, any kind of activism, again, privately, on your own time in your own room?"

Lukianoff says UW-Eau Claire's decision to engage in viewpoint discrimination is an odd stance for an institution of higher learning that is supposed to be fostering a diversity of beliefs and opinion. Furthermore, he adds, "for a university to decide that an acceptable alternative to banning the expression of only some viewpoints is to ban all viewpoints is disgraceful and shows a real ignorance of what it means to be a university in a free society."

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

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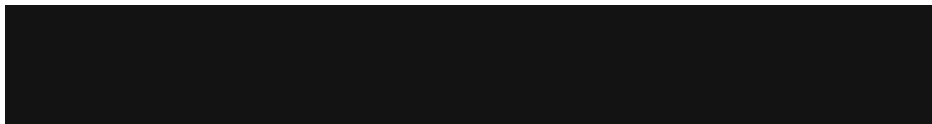
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