

The Daily Gamecock

FIRE Lights a Match under Dr. Palms and Women's Studies Classroom Requirements Cause Controversy

By Angel Sizemore

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Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) is concerned about the freedom of expression, and is not afraid to express their opinion.

FIRE, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring individual rights and due process, sent Dr. Palms a letter more than a month ago expressing concern about the stipulations of class participation in "Women's Studies 797: Seminar in Women's Studies," a required course for a degree in Women's Studies at USC.

Professor Lynn Weber requires students to adhere to set ideologies in order to participate in classroom discussions. The syllabus states that participation counts for 20 percent of a student's total grade. Weber also hands out "Guidelines for Classroom Discussion." These guidelines dictate students "acknowledge that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist."

Weber's "Guidelines" also suggest that "we are systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups."

In addition, the "Guidelines" outlined in the syllabus asks that students enrolled in the course "agree to combat actively the myths and stereotypes about our own group and other groups."

According to FIRE, a liberal arts institution should not force political beliefs on its students but should promote freethinking and consider individual opinions.

FIRE compares Weber's insistence that students agree with set standards to a religion professor demanding that his students commit themselves to Christian or atheistic beliefs in order to obtain a degree in theology.

According to FIRE representatives, "Students and professors should be at liberty to hold and voice any viewpoints they wish. A university in which students are not allowed to disagree with their professors on fundamental assumptions about reality is incapable of intellectual innovation, critical dialogue, meaningful discourse, or true scholarship."

FIRE contends that Dr. Palms must immediately address this potential breach of freedom at USC.

Dr. Palms has yet to respond to FIRE's letter. Lynn Weber and the director of FIRE could not be reached for comment.