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New speech policy proposals positive for NKU

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Issue date: 1/31/07 **Section:** [Viewpoints](#)

How much does it take to get free speech? Apparently decades, because it has taken nearly two of them for Northern Kentucky University to review its free-expression policy. I was astounded to hear that a review, done by Student Affairs and Legal Affairs, showed a 17-year gap in the revision of the policy. Seventeen years - that's how long it's been since NKU's free-expression policy was last updated.

I was also troubled to find out that NKU's speech code rating on the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education's Web site is still a blaring red, but so are many of the colleges listed on the site. In fact, most colleges listed have either yellow or red ratings. According to the Web site, a yellow rating means that one or more of the college's policies leave room for possible abuse of power in regards to freedom of speech and expression. The red rating signifies an even graver abuse of free speech, saying that at least one policy significantly restricts free speech.

This past December, NKU drafted a new free expression policy. It's already been accepted by the Faculty Senate. By March, modifications should be complete and, hopefully, approved by the Board of Regents.

So, maybe we are not actually far behind, but instead one of the leaders in freedom of expression, as far as colleges go. The new draft, which can be easily accessed via the Internet, allows students to coordinate unscheduled rallies with the stipulation that they would come on a first-come, first-serve basis. It also emphasizes for content-neutral regulation of posters, fliers and the like. I'm hoping students will take full

advantage of these new revisions.

I know this isn't the 1960s or 1970s, when demonstrations on college campuses were everyday events. Back then, wars were protested, bras were burned and the fight for freedom of expression was relished by college students all across the United States.

Now, I'm not suggesting that students start burning their undergarments or stop supporting our troops. What I am suggesting is that students utilize these new opportunities to voice their opinions. The more students exercise these rights, the more freedom of expression will remain at the forefront of issues, not buried under 17-year-old rules.

I'm looking forward to seeing students make the most of the new changes to express themselves. I'm also looking forward to seeing what color NKU's rating will be on FIRE's Web site. I'm hoping for green.

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