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Community college drops charges against student

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St. Louis Community College has dropped all charges against a student it had placed on probation for various infractions, some of which stemmed from e-mails he sent to classmates inviting them to drop a class with him and to find a different professor.

In return, Jun Xiao, a student at the Meramec campus, has agreed not to sue the college or its employees, according to the settlement agreement signed last week.

The national advocacy group Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which has said the college treated Xiao unfairly, posted the settlement agreement to its website. The American Civil Liberties Union, which represented Xiao, and the office of U.S. Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-St. Louis, also intervened in the matter.

"STLCC has finally corrected the worst of its violations of Jun Xiao's rights, but only after FIRE and the ACLU-EM took the case public," said Greg Lukianoff, the foundation's president. "We hope that in the future, STLCC will respect free speech and fair procedure from the beginning."

In a statement Wednesday, the college said simply that it was pleased to have reached an agreement with Xiao, who remains a student at the college. In the last couple of months, the college has declined to discuss the case, citing student privacy laws.

In October, the college put Xiao on probation, charging him with hazing and other disorderly conduct violations. It also barred him from e-mailing other classmates. Xiao appealed the charges.

Later, the college dropped the e-mailing charges, acknowledging that he has a right to free speech. But the school kept him on probation for allegedly asking too many questions in class and for allegedly verbally abusing a school secretary. Xiao again disputed these charges and questioned why the charges against him appeared to have changed.

Xiao asked why security had not been called if he had indeed verbally abused the secretary and why it was not reported for 10 days after the incident.

Xiao said Wednesday that he felt good about the settlement.

"It is victory, a victory of justice," he said, in an e-mail. "However, it is also a tragedy in that there should not have had such a victory at all in this democratic country."

He continued to criticize college officials for not providing him with the documents in his file as he repeatedly requested and which he said he had a right to see under state and federal laws. But he did finally receive those documents earlier this month.

He added that he otherwise liked the college. But he said a handful of employees had brought shame on it.

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