



Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

601 Walnut Street, Suite 510 • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106
T 215-717-3473 • F 215-717-3440 • fire@thefire.org • www.thefire.org

Greg Lukianoff
PRESIDENT

Robert L. Shibley
VICE PRESIDENT

William Creeley
DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND
PUBLIC ADVOCACY

Alan Charles Kors
CO-FOUNDER AND
CHAIRMAN EMERITUS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Harvey A. Silverglate
CO-FOUNDER AND
CHAIRMAN

Barbara Bishop
James E. Ferguson II
William J. Hume
Richard Losick
Joseph M. Maline
Marlene Mieske
Daphne Patai
Virginia Postrel
Daniel Shuchman

BOARD OF ADVISORS

Lloyd Buchanan
T. Kenneth Cribb, Jr.
Candace de Russy
William A. Dunn
Benjamin F. Hammond
Nat Hentoff
Roy Innis
Wendy Kaminer
Woody Kaplan
Leonard Liggio
Herbert London
Peter L. Malkin
Muriel Morisey
Steven Pinker
Milton Rosenberg
John R. Searle
Christina Hoff Sommers

September 24, 2010

President Joan H. Stewart
Hamilton College
Office of the President
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, New York 13323

URGENT

Sent via U.S. Mail and Facsimile (315-859-4991)

Dear President Stewart:

As you can see from the list of our directors and board of advisors, FIRE unites civil rights and civil liberties leaders, scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals across the political and ideological spectrum on behalf of liberty, due process, legal equality, voluntary association, freedom of speech, and academic freedom on our nation's college campuses. Our website, www.thefire.org, will give you a greater sense of our identity and activities.

FIRE is concerned about the threat to freedom of conscience posed by a mandatory, ideological presentation designed for male Hamilton College students to acknowledge their personal complicity in a "rape culture" on Hamilton's campus and to change their "rape-supportive beliefs" and attitudes. The mandatory presentation depends on "a combined cognitive and emotional intervention."

This is our understanding of the facts; please correct us if you believe we are in error.

On Tuesday, September 21, 2010, Northside Area Director Noelle Niznik, a member of the Residential Life staff at Hamilton College, e-mailed the EVENTS-ALL@listserv.hamilton.edu mailing list announcing a mandatory program for "First-Year men." The program, "She Fears You," is a presentation by Keith Edwards, founder of Men Ending Rape, on Monday, September 27, 2010, at 7:00 pm in the Chapel at Hamilton College. Edwards founded and served as Chair of the Commission for Social Justice Educators for the American College Personnel Association. First-year men were instructed to "be sure to bring your Hill Card" so that their attendance could be logged. First-year women, in contrast, are required to attend a one-act play called *Fresh* on either September 25 or September 26 in the Events Barn.

According to the text and videos at the Men Ending Rape website, menendingrape.org, the “She Fears You” presentation operates under the presumption that every college campus has “aspects of a rape culture [which] encourages, condones, and teaches rape.” Edwards admits that his understanding of these aspects is complex, but that they boil down to “the objectification of women; the subordination of women’s intelligence, capability, and humanity; the defining of masculinity as sexual conquest; and other intersecting forms of oppression.”

Men Ending Rape presentations teach students that a campus’ “rape culture” includes much expression that is a regular part of the free marketplace of ideas in a free society and at a liberal arts college such as Hamilton. Such expression is frequently a matter of significant social and political debate, but the mandatory presentation will teach that certain views must be made “no longer acceptable in any way.” As Edwards states in one of the videos:

[When] men and women on this campus start speaking up and talking about the T-shirts or the comments that people shout or the parties that happen, or the advertisement they see for events, and start confronting those things, and make this an environment where **it is no longer acceptable in any way to objectify women or define masculinity as sexual conquest, or subordinate women’s intelligence, capability, and humanity, or allow issues of racism, classism, and homophobia to go unabated**, then this campus will be a better place for all of us to be.” [Emphasis added.]

While Hamilton College is free to promulgate the ideal that these beliefs should be combated, an institution that promises—as Hamilton does—the right to think and speak freely may not **require** its students to attend a presentation explicitly billed as a “cognitive and emotional intervention” designed to reform their innermost beliefs.

When Hamilton College authorities force students to attend such a presentation lest they be punished, those authorities have encroached upon the very respect for humanity that Edwards intends to teach. The mandatory nature of this program cuts to the core of the most essential rights of a free people. Students must be free to choose whether or not to attend such a presentation. Hamilton College offends the fundamental intelligence and humanity of its male students by invading their freedom of conscience, the right to keep their innermost thoughts free from intrusion by the authorities. No agency of Hamilton College, no matter how noble the intended purpose, should believe it is morally acceptable to re-educate students by such coercive means.

At the heart of this concept relating to freedom of the mind is a recognition of our own limitations—like us, those in power are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, and therefore have no right to dictate to others what their deepest personal beliefs must be. Concerns for free speech and freedom of conscience are rooted in the wisdom of humility and restraint. It is hard to imagine a social goal more benign than that of reducing the heinous crime of sexual assault. However, this program, which presumes to show students the specific ideological, political, and moral assumptions they *must* make in order to be “better people,” crosses the boundary from education into unconscionably arrogant, invasive, and immoral thought reform. Students might choose to undergo this experience, but they must be offered the option of not undergoing it.

Please respect the basic humanity of first-year Hamilton College students and announce to all first-year men that their attendance at “She Fears You” is optional. Strongly encourage students to attend, if you like, but recognize that making this program mandatory violates core normative notions of freedom of conscience that are at the heart of our liberal democracy. Likewise, FIRE asks that you carefully consider the content and method of instruction in *Fresh* and then determine whether or not to make attendance at *Fresh* optional for first-year women.

FIRE became involved in this matter because more than one Hamilton College faculty member expressed their concern about this mandatory programming to us. Because of the imminence of these events, FIRE asks you to respond immediately by announcing that the first-year program for men is optional and notifying FIRE that you have done so. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Kissel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Kissel".

Adam Kissel
Vice President of Programs

cc:

A.G. Lafley, Chair, Board of Trustees, Hamilton College
Nancy Thompson, Dean of Students, Hamilton College
Patrick Reynolds, Interim Dean of the Faculty, Hamilton College
Travis Hill, Director of Residential Life, Hamilton College
Patrick Marino, Assistant Director of Residential Life, Hamilton College
Ashley Menard, Eastside Area Director, Office of Residential Life, Hamilton College
Noelle Niznik, Northside Area Director, Office of Residential Life, Hamilton College
Jean Burke, Staff Assistant, Office of Residential Life, Hamilton College