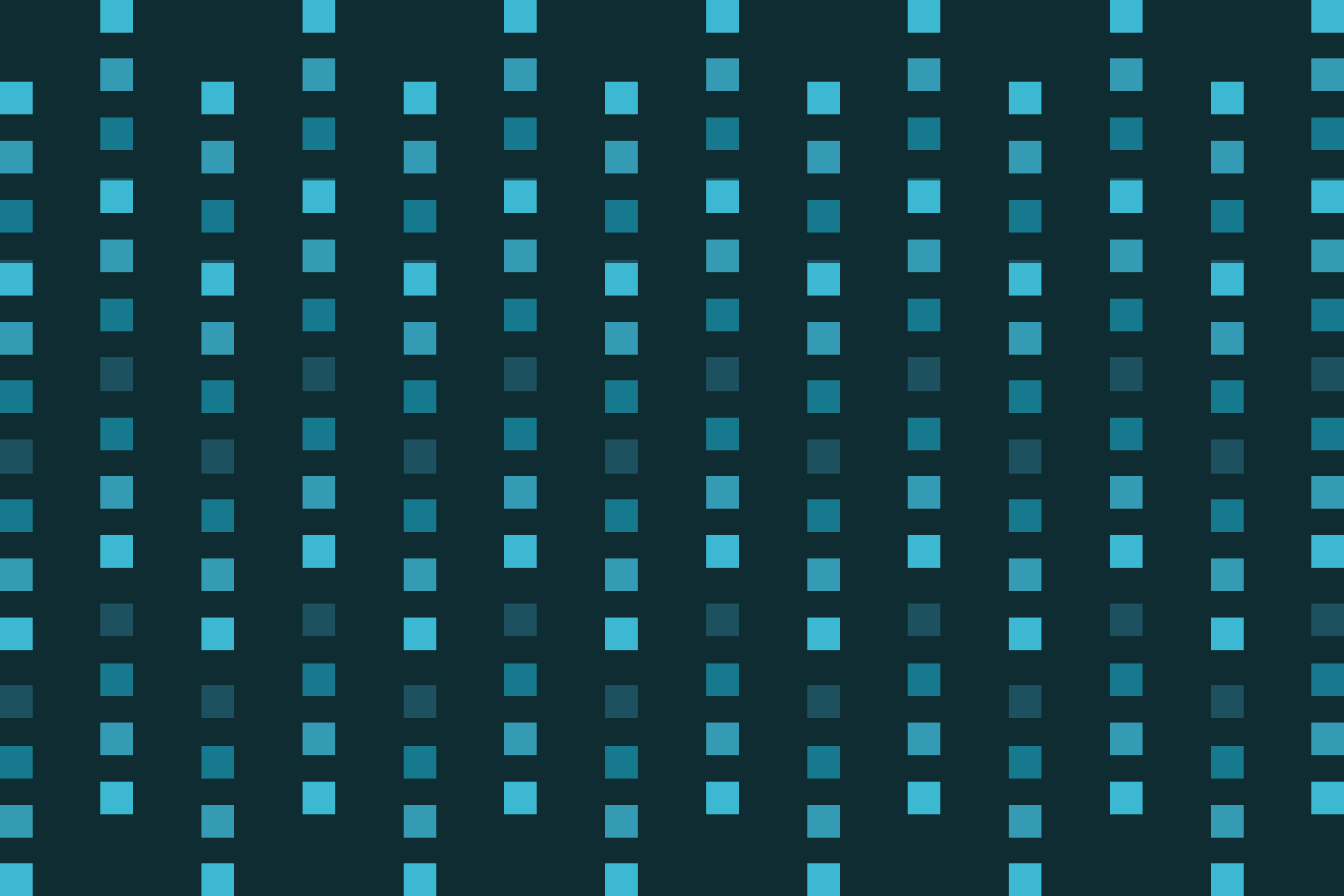




ANNUAL REPORT

2016–2017



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**“A champion of
First Amendment rights.”**

- The Chronicle of Higher Education

EXPANDING CHALLENGES

This year, we witnessed just how serious campus challenges have become.

“If FIRE started out as merely necessary 17 years ago, today you’ve become indispensable.”

- Jason Riley, 2016 FSN conference keynote speaker and
noted columnist

FROM CENSORSHIP BY ADMINISTRATORS. . .

- Administrative censorship has rapidly become more complex and often more indirect. Everything from artistic expression to political debate remains at risk, making it no surprise that FIRE received 997 case submissions last year—a new record.
- Many administrators have begun to rely on security fees as a way to silence inconvenient or unpopular speakers on campus, driving out unorthodox positions with what is essentially a tax on expression. FIRE encountered such cases at institutions such as the University of Alabama, the University of New Mexico, and DePaul University last year.
- More routine abuse continued as well. This past year, students were punished for gathering petition signatures without advance permission, hanging political campaign signs, and displaying art, while professors were subjected to months-long investigations for exam questions, classroom discussions, and social media posts.



TO NEW POLICY THREATS. . .

- There has been a rise in bias reporting systems on campus, which encourage students to anonymously report “biased” expression on a wide range of topics, including race, gender, or age and even credit history, behavior, or social affiliation. Not only do such reports threaten the speech in question, they also have a powerful chilling effect on campus speech.
- According to FIRE’s February 2017 survey, 232 public and private American colleges and universities publicly maintained bias response programs during the course of 2016, affecting an estimated 2.8 million students nationwide.
- Such policies have prompted reports based on classroom debates, academic assignments, Halloween costumes, campus chalking statements, political debates, and even the use of the phrase “on the other hand,” which represented bias on the basis of “ability.”

AND, MOST WORRISOME, THE OVERWHELMING SPREAD OF THE CULTURE OF ILLIBERALISM ON CAMPUS. . .

- The student government at Lawrence University denied recognition to a free-speech advocacy group, Students for Free Thought, citing its advocacy as a threat to the “well-being” of the campus. Likewise, the student government at Tufts University rejected a resolution for speech code reform by calling it “unsafe” and claiming that the school’s restrictive speech codes were actually “protective.”



TUFTS UNIVERSITY

- Faculty members at Wellesley College released a proposal calling on the college not to invite controversial speakers to campus, because such visits would “impose on the liberty” of students and further negatively affect them by forcing them to “invest time and energy in rebutting the speakers’ arguments.” Another group of faculty members at Boston College called on their institution to institute a zero-tolerance policy banning “hate speech.”
- In a classic example of just how infantilizing the new campus climate is, the University of Arizona’s “Diversity and Inclusiveness in the Classroom” manual currently advises professors, “If a student feels hurt or offended by another student’s comment, the hurt student can say ‘ouch.’ In acknowledgement, the student who made the hurtful comment says ‘oops.’”

- Evergreen State College erupted into controversy this spring after Professor Bret Weinstein sent a faculty-wide email objecting to a planned “Day of Absence,” during which it was suggested only people of color could be present on campus. In response, a group of protesting students disrupted Weinstein’s class and demanded

his resignation; students staged a sit-in in the college president’s office with a list of demands, including Weinstein’s suspension without pay; and Weinstein was forced to teach his classes off campus after campus police said they couldn’t ensure his safety.



THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY *David Litman/Shutterstock.com*

- 43.3 percent of respondents in a Newseum survey agreed that colleges should be able to ban controversial speakers. A Knight Foundation survey found that 69 percent of students support prohibiting speech described as “intentionally offensive to

certain groups.” Compare that to the 1976 General Social Survey, which found that 84 percent of 18–25 year-olds with some level of college education thought that an individual with racist views should be allowed to express themselves. Today, that number has fallen below 50 percent.

- Riots broke out at the University of California, Berkeley in February in response to a planned speech by controversial commentator Milo Yiannopoulos—even after the university had cancelled the speech, citing security concerns. Rather than elicit condemnation, many applauded that violence and a slew of student op-eds called it a justified response to the “threat” posed by Yiannopoulos’ expression.

A Knight Foundation survey found that 69 percent of students support prohibiting speech described as “intentionally offensive to certain groups.”

- Conservative writer Heather Mac Donald was similarly greeted by an angry mob at Claremont McKenna College, which blocked the entrances to her address, thereby forcing the college to broadcast her speech from an empty room under police guard.

- This March at Middlebury College, a group of students protesting a speech by well-known libertarian scholar Charles Murray became so disruptive that officials had to move Murray to a separate location to livestream his presentation. Even worse, when departing campus, student protesters surrounded Murray and the event moderator, Middlebury Professor Allison Stanger, jumping and pounding on their car. Stanger ultimately had to be treated at a local hospital for a neck injury after a protestor grabbed her hair and twisted her neck. The reason for such protests? According to a statement by student protestors, Murray’s presence on campus was “an intense act of aggression” and his speech was so “dangerous” that it was unworthy of debate.

As all of this demonstrates, today’s campus challenges are multidimensional—encompassing everything from restrictive policies and administrative violations to student-led censorship and even violence.

Fortunately, FIRE’s approach to this fight is also multidimensional, and over the past year, our expanding programs have directly confronted campus threats at every possible level. In doing so, we not only recorded progress towards our goals, we also had a real impact in the lives of students and faculty members across the country.



HEATHER MAC DONALD *Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0*

EXPANDING RESPONSE

FIRE's growth over the past year has been remarkable and as a result, our response to challenges on campus has never been stronger. With support from our donors, FIRE has been able to secure significant achievements, including . . .

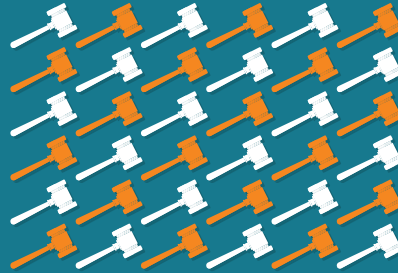
“With organizations such as FIRE . . . I feel confident that my profession is in safe hands.”

- Ben Beshwate, associate professor,
Cerro Coso Community College

THE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS DEFENSE
PROGRAM WON 18 VICTORIES ON BEHALF
OF INDIVIDUALS.



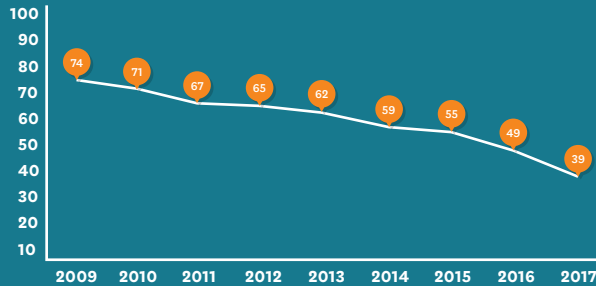
FIRE'S POLICY REFORM PROJECT WON 36
POLICY CHANGE VICTORIES AFFECTING
OVER 520,000 STUDENTS.



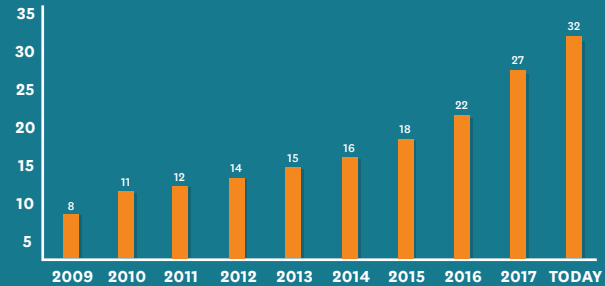
FIRE WELCOMED A RECORD SEVEN
SCHOOLS TO OUR "GREEN LIGHT" LIST,
WORKING WITH THEM TO REVISE ALL
OF THEIR RESTRICTIVE POLICIES AND
FREEING MORE THAN 80,000 STUDENTS
FROM SPEECH CODES.



THE PERCENTAGE OF "RED LIGHT" COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
THAT SYSTEMATICALLY VIOLATE STUDENTS' AND FACULTY MEMBERS'
RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION DROPPED TO 39 PERCENT.



OUR SPEECH CODE REPORTS HAVE RECORDED A GROWING
NUMBER OF GREEN LIGHT SCHOOLS IN RECENT YEARS.



MORE AND MORE STATES ARE PASSING LEGISLATION TO PROTECT STUDENT RIGHTS.



LEGISLATION BANNING “FREE SPEECH ZONES” AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN COLORADO AND UTAH FREED MORE THAN 425,000 STUDENTS IN THESE STATES FROM SUCH POLICIES THIS YEAR.

425,000 STUDENTS FREED

FIRE WON YET ANOTHER LITIGATION VICTORY THIS YEAR, AT IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY. THE DECISION WILL BENEFIT THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS ACROSS THE EIGHTH CIRCUIT’S SEVEN STATES.



IN SUM, FIRE WON 57 VICTORIES AFFECTING OVER 1.2 MILLION STUDENTS THIS PAST YEAR. THAT IS NEARLY 1 OUT OF EVERY 16 STUDENTS NATIONWIDE WHO’VE BENEFITED FROM FIRE’S ADVOCACY.



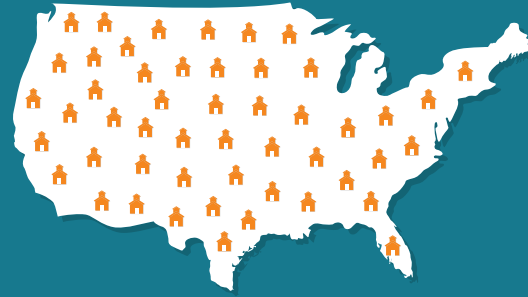
SINCE OUR FOUNDING IN 1999, FIRE HAS WON 469 VICTORIES AT 288 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AFFECTING ALMOST 6.8 MILLION STUDENTS.



THE FIRE STUDENT NETWORK ADDED OVER 2,100 STUDENT, FACULTY, AND ALUMNI MEMBERS.



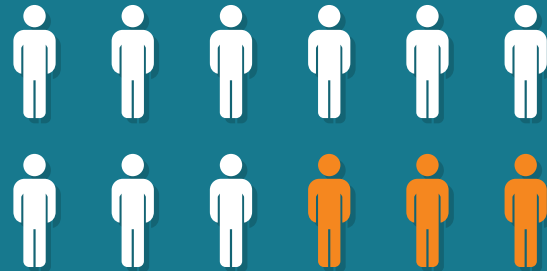
FIRE STAFF VISITED NEARLY 50 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AROUND THE COUNTRY.



IN APRIL, FIRE HOSTED 55 STUDENTS FOR OUR FIRST-EVER WEST COAST REGIONAL CONFERENCE.



FIRE WELCOMED NINE UNDERGRADUATE INTERNS AND THREE LEGAL INTERNS FOR OUR 2017 INTERNSHIP PROGRAM.



FIRE RECEIVED OVER 600 APPLICATIONS FOR OUR UNDERGRAD INTERNSHIP; MORE THAN 125 APPLICATIONS FOR OUR REGIONAL CONFERENCE; AND OVER 225 APPLICATIONS FOR OUR 2017 SUMMER CONFERENCE.



UNDERGRADUATE
INTERNSHIP

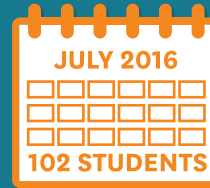


REGIONAL CONFERENCE



SUMMER
CONFERENCE

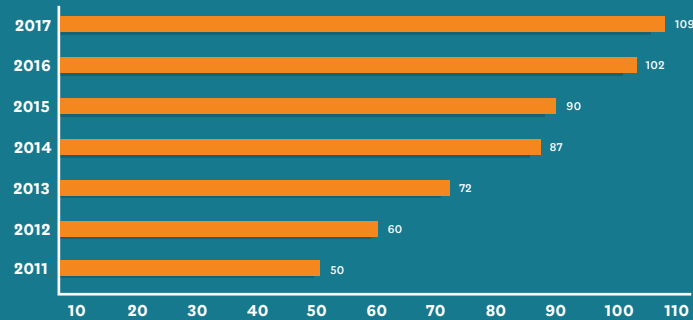
102 STUDENTS ATTENDED FIRE'S NINTH ANNUAL SUMMER CONFERENCE IN JULY 2016 AND 109 ATTENDED OUR TENTH ANNUAL EVENT IN JULY 2017.



&



THE NUMBER OF ATTENDEES AT FIRE'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE CONTINUES TO GROW.



FIRE WAS FEATURED IN 2,233 NEWS ARTICLES IN ALMOST 1,000
UNIQUE PUBLICATIONS.



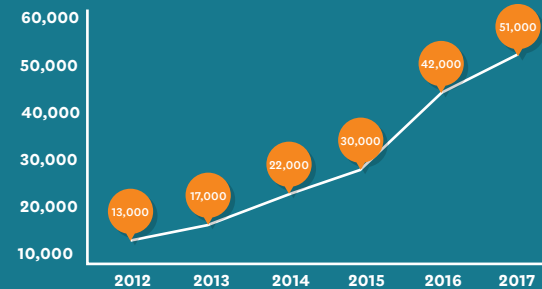
FIRE STAFF AND REPRESENTATIVES SPOKE ON 60 RADIO
BROADCASTS AND MADE 18 TELEVISION APPEARANCES.



FIRE'S WEBSITE ATTRACTED NEARLY 1.2 MILLION VISITORS
THIS YEAR.



FIRE'S SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK HAS
GROWN CONSIDERABLY.



FIRE PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED 34 VIDEOS.



FIRE'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL HAS OVER 5 MILLION VIEWS AND 11,000 SUBSCRIBERS.

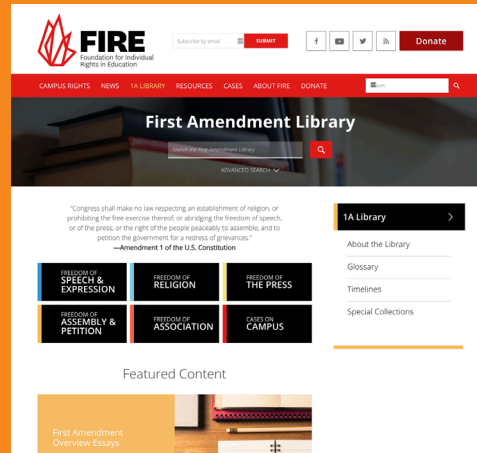


"SO TO SPEAK: THE FREE SPEECH PODCAST" RELEASED 29 PODCASTS AND ATTRACTED OVER 50,000 PLAYS.



50,000
PLAYS

FIRE launched our new First Amendment Library, a free, online database of First Amendment-related materials, including illustrated timelines, special collections, unique articles, and more than 900 Supreme Court cases concerning the First Amendment. Available at firstamendmentlibrary.com, it is an easy-to-use, ever-expanding resource for students, law clerks, lawmakers, judges, lawyers, journalists, and anyone else who wants to learn about the First Amendment.

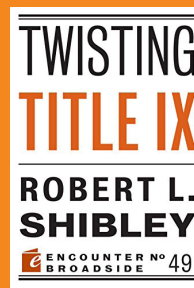


FIRE launched our new, three-year Speech, Outreach, Advocacy, and Research (SOAR) Project in January. SOAR will focus on everything from conducting public opinion polling and academic research to publishing a high school curriculum and engaging in faculty and alumni outreach. It will be invaluable to FIRE's efforts to fight campus illiberalism, and we are looking forward to its impact in the coming years.

In March, donor support helped FIRE launch our new Million Voices Campaign, which is working with talented attorneys from across the country to secure legal victories liberating one million students from unconstitutional speech codes.



FIRE's Executive Director Robert Shibley released a short book titled *Twisting Title IX*, which reviews how Title IX has become a behemoth that increasingly threatens student and faculty due process rights.



FIRE was featured in two major profiles this year, in *The New York Times* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.



MOLLY NOCHECK, GREG LUKIANOFF, NICO PERRINO, WILL CREELEY
Photo taken for The New York Times by Jessica Kourkounis

HELPING INDIVIDUALS

Outside of the numbers and the data behind FIRE's success, there's the far more important evidence of our impact—the stories of the individuals we serve. By supporting FIRE, our donors helped protect vulnerable individuals, empower activists, and educate students.

“Thanks again for your
expertise, we very much
appreciate it!”

- Student praise for FIRE's policy reform team

STRUGGLING STUDENTS CAN NOW OPEN UP

After seeking counseling following a sexual assault, Northern Michigan University student Katerina Klawes received an email from the university administration warning her not to discuss “suicidal or self-destructive thoughts or actions” with her peers. Citing university policy, Katerina was told she could face disciplinary action for opening up about her mental health struggles. Sadly, Katerina was not the only student to face such a warning—despite the fact that mental health professionals overwhelmingly believe in the merits of giving individuals the opportunity to share their thoughts about suicide or self-harm. Even after a petition drive and public controversy, the university failed to act to reverse the policy. Fortunately, FIRE stepped in on behalf of Katerina and students like her. Just days after we issued a national press release calling on the university to overturn the policy, it announced it would discontinue the practice. Now, students like Katerina are free to share their feelings and seek help from peers on campus.



ARTIST IS FREE TO SPARK CONVERSATIONS

Samantha Valdez’s anti-lynching art display was meant to encourage meaningful dialogue about race on Winthrop University’s campus, but instead resulted in Samantha being charged with violating two speech codes and facing expulsion. Samantha, along with her group, Association of Artists for Change, prepared an art installation featuring figures in the trees outside Winthrop’s Tillman Hall. They also installed a sign reading “Tillman’s Legacy,” a reference to its namesake Benjamin Tillman, a South Carolina governor whose time in office coincided with an increase in the number of lynchings of African Americans in the state. In response, Winthrop’s president sent a campus-wide email suggesting that “hurtful” art could be punishable, and Samantha was subsequently charged with “disturbing the public order and peace” and “disorderly conduct.” Thanks to our Individual Rights Defense Program, those charges were dropped and Samantha avoided punishment for her artistic expression.



PAUL GERLICH AND ERIN FURLEIGH *Iowa State University students*

ACTIVISTS GET THE RIGHT TO ENGAGE

Wichita State University student Maria Church worked hard to gather materials to apply to start a new Young Americans for Liberty chapter on her campus. When the application was brought before the student government, Maria was grilled by representatives about the group's views on "safe spaces," its support for the First Amendment, its stance on limiting "hate speech," and more.

Now, the chapter is free to engage in advocacy and express their opinions on campus.

During deliberations, representatives called the group "dangerous" and a "hate group," ultimately denying the chapter recognition. Fortunately, Maria and her fellow students came to FIRE for help and after we wrote the administration, the student government was forced to reverse its decision. Now, the chapter is free to engage in advocacy and express their opinions on campus.

SILENCED STUDENTS VINDICATED IN COURT

Iowa State University students Paul Gerlich and Erin Furleigh know firsthand just how stubborn administrative censors can be. As members of their university's chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, Paul and Erin were repeatedly refused their constitutional right to expression by administrators, who refused to allow their group to include any ISU name or branding on their T-shirts. Paul described their experiences well, saying, "What leaves us really disappointed is that we were actively involved with campus, and yet, our voices were still silenced." That's why Paul and Erin chose to challenge ISU's violations in court, in concert with FIRE's Stand Up For Speech Litigation Project. This June, their rights were vindicated when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit ruled in their favor. Thanks to FIRE, now Paul and Erin, plaintiffs in nine other Stand Up For Speech cases, and the thousands of students affected by litigation victories, don't need to feel silenced anymore.

GIVING A VOICE TO THOSE TARGETED BY CENSORS

Last fall, Pierce College student Kevin Shaw attempted to distribute copies of the U.S. Constitution along the main public walkway through the heart of Pierce College. “My only intention was to get students thinking about our founding principles and to inspire discussion of liberty and free speech,” said Kevin. Unfortunately, Kevin was soon approached by an administrator who told him that he could not distribute literature outside the campus “free speech zone,” a tiny area on campus measuring 616 square feet and comprising about .003 percent of the total area of Pierce College’s 426-acre campus. He was also told he must fill out a permit application to use that area and that if he refused to comply, he would be asked to leave campus. Kevin chose to challenge that violation, and FIRE was right there to fight with him. He is now working with FIRE’s new Million Voices Litigation Campaign to fight the Pierce policy—and policies throughout the entire Los Angeles Community College District.



KEVIN SHAW *Pierce College student*

EMPOWERING THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST

FIRE's impact on students isn't always in response to their experience with censorship. Support from our donors also helps FIRE give activists the positive experiences they need to work for reform. Each summer students enjoy such an experience when they join us as part of our Internship Program. Motivated by their eight-week tenure at FIRE and girded by newfound knowledge, our 2016 interns went on to host campus events, stage protests, write op-eds, work with administrators, advocate for peers, and



FIRE SUMMER INTERNS

more. Said one intern, “As an intern at FIRE I was consistently given hands on opportunities to contribute to the defense of civil liberties on campus . . . I leave the internship reinvigorated to work for student rights on campus.”

ENABLING ACTIVISTS NATIONWIDE

FIRE has also welcomed hundreds of students to Philadelphia for our FIRE Student Network conference, an annual event that gives students the opportunity to learn and grow together as activists for the First Amendment. One student said the 2016 event was “easily the highlight of my summer,” and another said the

“Attending the conference
was easily the highlight of
my summer.”

- FIRE Student Network Conference Attendee

experience would be “treasured for a lifetime.” Others reported they “learned so much more than expected,” and were “moved and challenged by the speakers and



STUDENTS AT THE FSN SUMMER CONFERENCE 2016

conversations had with everyone there.” That positive feedback soon transformed into positive action. Individuals like University of Connecticut student Amelia Subervi, Wesleyan University student Henry Spiro, University of Maryland student Rick Tagne Teta, and Cornell College student Carl Schaeffer returned to campus and began working for reform, writing op-eds, meeting with administrators, starting policy campaigns, and more.

“The wisdom imparted will be treasured for a lifetime.”

- FIRE Student Network Conference Attendee

These are the real stories of FIRE—and the real reflection of our donors’ contributions. While the challenges we face may sometimes seem insurmountable, together with our supporters, we are advancing progress and helping individuals across the country enjoy their rights, understand the principles of free expression, and promote the fundamental value of the First Amendment.



STUDENTS AT THE FSN SUMMER CONFERENCE 2016

KEY FINANCIALS

From FIRE's 16-17 Fiscal Year

“There are other groups that fight for First Amendment rights on campus, but none as vocal—or pushy—as FIRE . . .”

- *The New York Times*

REVENUE

Contributions: \$10,758,302

Investment: \$15,653

Other: \$84,986

TOTAL: \$10,858,941

EXPENSES

Program: \$5,299,379

Administrative: \$697,152

Development: \$790,762

TOTAL: \$6,787,293

ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

Cash and Equivalents: \$10,048,948

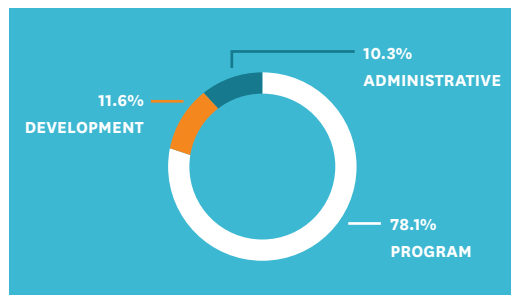
Pledges and Receivables: \$328,092

Fixed Assets: \$1,308,153

Other Assets: \$318,282

Liabilities: (\$1,311,191)

NET ASSETS: \$10,692,284





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The mission of FIRE is to defend and sustain individual rights at America's colleges and universities. These rights include freedom of speech, legal equality, due process, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience—the essential qualities of individual liberty and dignity. FIRE's core mission is to protect the unprotected and to educate the public and communities of concerned Americans about the threats to these rights on our campuses and about the means to preserve them.

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