



# FIRE

Foundation for Individual  
Rights in Education

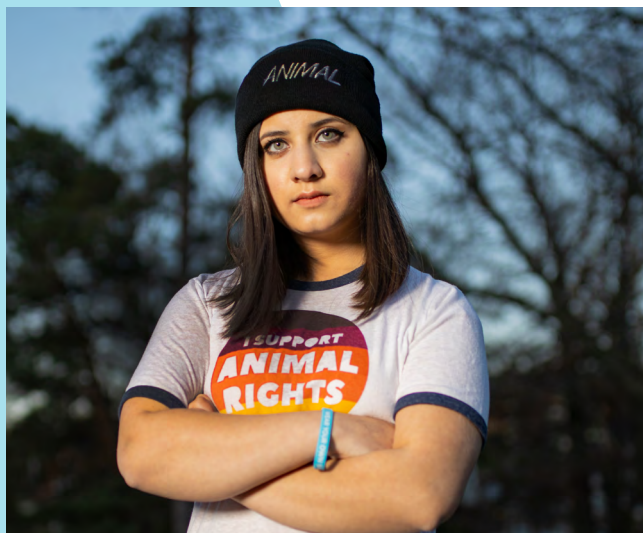
## IMPACT REPORT

### JUNE 2020



During the first half of 2020, FIRE coordinated aggressive and creative campaigns aimed at combating major threats to campus rights. Through these efforts, we have recorded the following impacts:

- Through a combination of defense work, policy reforms, and litigation, FIRE has secured 21 victories affecting more than 1.5 million students just in the first half of 2020.
- **We won one of our biggest-ever victories at the start of May when the Department of Education finalized and released its new Title IX regulations.** The regulations guarantee critical due process protections that Americans recognize as essential to securing justice, but that have for too long been denied to students accused of sexual misconduct on college campuses. In the last decade, FIRE has led the fight against the erosion of due process on campus, and now we will work to vigorously defend these hard-fought gains and ensure the regulations are implemented on campuses across the country.
- The new Title IX regulations are also a big win *for free speech rights* on campus. After FIRE’s steadfast persistence, the department will rely on the Supreme Court’s standard to fairly define student-on-student sexual harassment.
- FIRE’s **Individual Rights Defense Program (IRDP)** reviewed more than 344 cases since January, aiding individuals through referrals, behind-the-scenes support, and direct intervention. That direct intervention has resulted in 11 victories including the official recognition of an animal rights club that was originally denied recognition due to concerns of “emotional risk.” We also successfully defended a professor whose academic freedom was threatened for three quiz questions about Islamic terrorism that a student said were “in distaste of Islam.”
- FIRE’s **Policy Reform Project** has won ten policy change victories, affecting over 200,000 students. These victories include the addition of two new institutions—Emory University and Florida State University—to our coveted “green light” list of schools that maintain no restrictive speech policies. There are now 54 green light schools nationwide, which means over one million students attend schools where they can speak freely, publish op-eds without fear of reprisal, and stand up for causes they care about!



**Naomi Mathew**, Truman State University recognizes animal rights club after FIRE advocated for fairer club recognition policies.

- Our **Free Expression Campaign** continues to encourage schools to adopt the free speech statement produced by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago (the “Chicago Statement”). Thanks to FIRE’s advocacy, a total of 72 institutions have adopted or endorsed the Chicago Statement. For a full list, please visit [thefire.org/chicago-statement-university-and-faculty-body-support](https://thefire.org/chicago-statement-university-and-faculty-body-support).
- This spring, FIRE released our first-ever freshman orientation program. FIRE, in partnership with New York University’s First Amendment Watch, developed a series

of modules for universities to utilize during those first, critical days when incoming students are learning about their new life as college students. Our program fills a crucial gap and teaches new students about free speech, academic freedom, and the principles behind the First Amendment. Our hope is that, starting this fall, universities will adapt the modules most applicable to their institution for use during freshman orientation, first-year seminars, and other campus programs.

- FIRE's **Litigation Program** continues to challenge unconstitutional policies across the country. We have continued to file amicus briefs, send demand letters, and we helped a faculty member at Kirkwood Community College receive a \$25,000 settlement after he was wrongfully removed from the classroom. In addition to all of this, we are continuing to pursue justice in our suit against Jones County Junior College. In an order issued in late May, a federal district court allowed Mike Brown's case against Jones Community College and several administrators to move forward. Last September, FIRE filed a lawsuit on behalf of Mike Brown and his student group, a campus chapter of Young Americans for Liberty, after college administrators twice stopped him from speaking with fellow students about the YAL chapter and civil liberties issues.



**Jeff Klinzman**, Kirkwood Community College

- FIRE has been featured in nearly 2,000 news articles in more than 1,000 unique publications since January. We have been featured in *National Review*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *the Hill*, *Real Clear Policy*, and more. FIRE's executive director, Robert Shibley, published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* about the new Title IX regulations, and we have 225 media hits just on the Title IX victory alone.
- FIRE's podcast series, *So to Speak*, has posted 112 episodes in its lifetime and, in the last six months, it has attracted over 42,000 downloads. Some of our guests have included: constitutional law expert Josh Blackman discussing the constitutionality of COVID-19 lockdowns; Duke University School of Law professor Joseph Blocher on free speech and justified true belief; and professor Patrick M. Markey's research on video game violence.
- FIRE's **Student Defenders** program continues to train students to become peer judicial advocates, and it now boasts programs with strong connections to FIRE at a dozen schools including Cornell University, the University of Chicago, Duke University, and Georgetown University.
- In May, we welcomed ten undergraduate interns and three legal interns. Our undergraduates come from Wellesley College, Yale University, the University of Colorado, Spelman College, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Davidson College, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of South Florida, and Vanderbilt University. Our legal interns hail from the University of Oklahoma, the University of Nevada, and Duke University. Our **Internship Program** will give these students direct experience defending civil liberties and provide them with educational opportunities, including participating in academic seminars with FIRE's leadership and other free speech experts.
- In April, FIRE released a first-of-its-kind survey on public universities and how they manage their social media pages. We found that **the majority (77%) of top public colleges and universities use a blacklist of**



**secret words, created by Facebook, to automatically censor comments on the university's Facebook pages.** Additionally, 3 in 10 colleges or universities use a *custom* blacklist, collectively censoring 1,825 unique words and phrases. FIRE's report also found that 87% of colleges blocked particular users on Facebook or Twitter. In short, administrators are abusing social platform tools to censor posts and users—transforming their pages from public forums into curated promotional platforms.

- FIRE's new free speech comic, *Finding Your Voice*, teaches middle school and high school students about their rights in an approachable and entertaining way. The graphic novel has been so popular that we have distributed over 14,000 copies and just put in an order for 15,000 more. Let us know if you would like one!
- In February, we announced the winners of our annual High School Essay Contest after receiving over 1,600 entries. The first-place winner is a high school senior from Wisconsin. In total, FIRE awarded \$20,000 in college scholarships to the winners of our contest.
- Finally, we've had a successful start to the year in the media and on our various online platforms. FIRE staff members have spoken on 25 radio broadcasts, made 7 television appearances, and appeared at 10 public speaking events. FIRE's Video Initiative has produced 21 videos, and FIRE's YouTube channel now has almost six million views and nearly 14,000 subscribers. FIRE currently boasts nearly 35,000 Facebook "likes" and over 39,000 Twitter followers.