



Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

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July 12, 2011

Henry M. Huckaby
Chancellor, University System of Georgia
Suite 7025
270 Washington Street, SW
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

Sent via U.S. Mail and Facsimile (404-657-6979)

Dear Chancellor Huckaby:

Congratulations on beginning your term as Chancellor of the University System of Georgia (USG). I am the Vice President of Programs at the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a nonprofit organization uniting leaders in the fields of civil rights and civil liberties, scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals from across the political and ideological spectrum on behalf of liberty, legal equality, academic freedom, due process, freedom of speech, and freedom of conscience on America's college campuses. Our website, thefire.org, will give you a greater understanding of our identity and activities.

I write to bring your attention to the violation of the free speech rights of art instructor Stanley Bermudez by Gainesville State College (GSC), a USG institution. GSC President Martha T. Nesbitt removed Bermudez's painting from a faculty art exhibition due to its anti-Confederate content. We have asked President Nesbitt to acknowledge the error and to announce that protected expression will never again meet the censorship that GSC committed against Bermudez, but she has entirely failed to respond. This failure represents a significant, ongoing threat to free speech and academic freedom at GSC. I have enclosed the relevant correspondence.

It is instructive to contrast this failure with the fast, cooperative responses of two other presidents of USG institutions in free speech cases. In 2009, University of West Georgia President Beheruz N. Sethna's administration resolved a free speech violation within two months of being alerted to it by FIRE (see <http://thefire.org/case/797.html>). In 2008, then-Valdosta State University President Patrick J. Schloss rescinded the university's unconstitutional "free speech zone" policy shortly after taking office (see <http://thefire.org/case/765.html>).

Meanwhile, Nesbitt's violations of Bermudez's right to freedom of speech and academic freedom have brought widespread and well-deserved criticism upon GSC.

I hope that you will do what Nesbitt has failed to do and assure the GSC community that no one will be censored or punished for exercising their rights. FIRE respectfully asks for a response to this letter by August 1, 2011.

Sincerely,



Adam Kissel

Vice President of Programs

Enclosures

cc:

Martha T. Nesbitt, President, Gainesville State College

Beheruz N. Sethna, President, University of West Georgia

Patrick J. Schloss, Special Assistant to the Executive Vice Chancellor for Retention, Progression,
and Graduation, University System of Georgia