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William Creeley
Director of Legal and Public Advocacy
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
601 Walnut Street, Suite 510
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Mr. Creeley:

I write in response to your letter of December 9 concerning the Penn State Principles. Your letter is of interest and useful to us, even though you take great license in interpreting how the Principles are used and thus misinterpret University policy.

The Principles were drafted by me about a decade ago early in my tenure as President of Penn State. Following consultation with campus leaders, including students, the Principles since that time have been sent to all newly admitted students along with an introductory letter from me. They have been sent to about 150,000 students. No objection by a single student or parent has ever been registered nor has there ever been a hint that anyone interpreted the Principles as policy. The statement is intended to be an expression of University values that we hope our students, faculty, staff, and administration possess.

The statements indeed reflect values of mine, and I am pleased that we will find them in abundance at Penn State. It is my belief that leaders are too often reluctant to say what they believe is important. I have always done so, including speaking out often about the same principles that serve as a basis for the work of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Your letter states that the Penn State Principles “are not aspirational, but rather statements of policy.” They are indeed aspirational but decidedly not statements of policy. They have never been used to interfere with the academic or personal freedoms of any student, have never been used for disciplinary purposes, and there is nothing in our student code of conduct that references the Principles. Students are not required to affirm the Principles. They are not, as you state, “mandatory commitments to a certain code.” They do not constitute, as you state, “policy that arguably bars...”

In order to eliminate the possibility that someone might incorrectly construe the Principles as University policy, we have decided to change the preamble. Your request that we “clarify to students and administrators at the University that protected expression may never and will never be prohibited, investigated, or punished” is appropriate, and I thank you for writing to me about it.

Sincerely,

Graham B. Spanier