

January 13, 2004

President Shirley Robinson Pippins
Suffolk County Community College, Ammerman Campus
37 Norman F. Lehtrecker Building
533 College Road
Selden, New York 11784-2899

Dear President Pippins,

On October 6 of last year, I wrote to you regarding then-president Salvatore J. La Lima's treatment of SCCC student Ursula Monaco. As you will recall, Ms. Monaco was unlawfully punished for accidentally sending an e-mail with profanity in it to a professor.

On October 30, the day before he was to step down, President La Lima wrote to Ms. Monaco to inform her that he was "suspending" her punishment effective October 31. In the letter, President La Lima admitted that the e-mail for which Ms. Monaco was sanctioned did not constitute "any real form of harassment."

We are pleased that President La Lima came to that realization; however, we are profoundly troubled by both his claim that "the panel that heard this case acted in good faith" and his failure to expunge Ms. Monaco's unjust punishment from her record. President La Lima stated that what was done to Ms. Monaco was wrong—a finding that has been obvious to FIRE and the Student Press Law Center, and should be clear to any other objective evaluator of the charges of "harassment" and "intimidation" against Ms. Monaco. Ms. Monaco never should have had to face this lengthy ordeal, and for this reason it should not be included in her permanent record. Whether or not it acted in "good faith," the judicial panel that convicted Ms. Monaco trampled her most basic civil liberties for many months, and it is a grave wrong for that verdict to remain on her record.

I am enclosing copies of SCCC's response to our first letter and of our second letter to SCCC, in which we explain that Ursula Monaco's behavior constituted neither harassment nor intimidation in any lawfully punishable sense. We ask that you stand up for your students' rights and expunge all mention of this unfortunate and illiberal incident from Ms. Monaco's record. It is not within the lawful power of a state agency like SCCC to punish Ms. Monaco for her constitutionally protected speech under these circumstances.

Simply ending the months-long punishment does not resolve the matter; the punishment must be overturned and your students and faculty reassured that their basic rights will not be disregarded again. Free inquiry is at the core of the process of higher education, and a public institution like SCCC is required by the First Amendment to protect free inquiry—not to silence it.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Greg Lukianoff
Director of Legal and Public Advocacy

cc:

James F. Canniff, Vice President for Academic and Campus Affairs, Suffolk County Community College
Michael Weissberg, Vice President for Student Affairs, Suffolk County Community College
Steven F. Schrier, Vice President for Legal, Planning and Information Services, Suffolk County Community College
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Encl. (2)