

To whom it may concern:

Your organization has expressed a keen interest in the events surrounding the URI College Republicans' actions regarding their offer of a 'White, Heterosexual, American Male scholarship' to the URI student body, and the URI Student Senate's response to those actions. In particular, your communications indicated that your main areas of concern were that the College Republicans' advertisement of the scholarship was a satire (and therefore political, protected speech) and that one element of the Senate's sanction treads into areas of unconstitutional compelled speech. Both of these concerns are understandable, but we believe that your interest has been whetted by an inaccurate portrayal of the facts and situation at hand.

Concerning the issue of satire, the Senate had been presented with significant evidence that the College Republicans, at the time of their advertisement of the scholarship, meant to distribute the scholarship in earnest, and that while the tone of the event was critical of political policy, was never meant in jest or for satirical purposes. In point of fact, the College Republicans by their own admission collected money from donors and members to make funds available for the scholarship, placed an advertisement in our local newspaper to solicit applications for that scholarship, and then collected applications from qualified applicants, none of whom were informed that the scholarship was a political stunt or satire. Furthermore, the College Republicans had revealed to the committee that they had selected a recipient from among the applicants, and had only refrained from actual distribution due to 'technical problems', the nature of which they never revealed. Latter that month, after the receipt of a complaint, the SOARC chair directed the the Colleged Replubicans not to distribute the scholarship pending an investigation.

By all indications, after the first investigatory meeting that the Senate had with the College Republicans, the scholarship was real and was, because of its nature, in violation of the Senate's non-discrimination clause. Compliance with that clause, along with all other regulations concerning student groups, are a requisite of Senate recognition, a fact of which all student organizations are made aware and must sign acknowledgement of in order to achieve and maintain recognized status. Since they had spent student tax funds to place the advertisement for the event, the violation occurred once the advertisement was paid for. Since we are in possession of the receipts for that advertisement, including the signature of the President of College Republicans authorizing the expenditure, there is no question or ambiguity on whether a violation occurred. It was indicated to the College Republicans that violations of this sort are a serious matter and that the sanction indicated in our by-laws as being appropriate for this situation would be revocation of their recognized status.

It was only after this point, with these determinations having been made by the committee with jurisdiction, that the College Republicans abruptly changed their story about their intentions regarding the scholarship. Suddenly and unbelievably, at the second meeting between the Senate and the College Republicans, they asserted that all along the intention of the scholarship advertisement and event was entirely satirical, and that the scholarship was never intended to be distributed. In any case, the President of the College

Republicans himself, during the Senate appeal hearing, conceded that regardless of whether the scholarship was intended in earnest or in satire, that the appearance of their intention to any person reading the advertisement was “ambiguous at best”.

It is the custom of the Senate, though we are under no obligation to do so, to find in these sorts of situations a way that the group being sanctioned for their actions have an option to avoid outright revocation of recognition. Thus, while the default sanction on the table was revocation, the committee sought to come to an acceptable alternative sanction that would allow the group the ability to continue to function but would still outline the seriousness of their violation. Such alternative sanctions, when offered, are always narrowly tailored to the nature of the violation and address the specific harm that proceeded from the group’s actions. These offers of alternative sanction are entirely the purview of the group to accept or decline; there is no force or attempt to compel a group to take such a sanction, though it is strongly suggested and preferred by the Senate, as it is nearly always better for both parties for a group to continue to exist than for it to be dissolved.

The College Republicans, in this case, declined to accept the initial offer of alternative sanction. We asked them what their concerns were regarding such a sanction, in order to leave open the possibility of further tailoring the offer to address their concerns if possible. After listening to their concerns, which included the potential for public embarrassment or shaming, the committee retooled the alternative sanction offer to make the contrition portion of the sanction separate from their open communication to the student body as a whole.

Despite this newly tailored offer, also of which we were under no obligation to make, the College Republicans declined, as is their right, rather absurdly accusing the Senate of attempting to compel their speech. The College Republicans were at all times since the inception of this process aware that the sanction being offered was in lieu of the revocation of their recognition, and so they were well aware of the action that would result.