



Foundation for Individual Rights in Education

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March 16, 2007

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Mount Pleasant, Michigan 48859

Sent by U.S. Mail and Facsimile (989-774-3665)

Alan Charles Kors
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Dear President Rao:

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As you can see from our Directors and Board of Advisors, FIRE unites civil rights and civil liberties leaders, scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals across the political and ideological spectrum on behalf of liberty, due process, legal equality, freedom of speech, religious liberty, and, in this case, freedom of association on America's college campuses. Our web page, www.thefire.org, will give you a greater sense of our identity and activities.

FIRE is deeply concerned about the threat to freedom of association posed by Central Michigan University's (CMU's) policy forbidding secular, ideologically based student groups from limiting membership to students with shared political or ideological beliefs.

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This is our understanding of the facts; please inform us if you believe we are in error. Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) is a Registered Student Organization (RSO) at CMU. In Article I, Section 2 of its constitution, YAF describes itself as "a conservative non-partisan, non-sectarian voluntary educational organization at Central Michigan University." Article I, Section 3 of the constitution states that YAF is governed by the Sharon Statement of 1960.

YAF members have informed FIRE that following an attempt by the CMU student government to derecognize YAF last February, students from an assortment of liberal groups began attending and disrupting YAF meetings. Some students established a group on Facebook.com for "People who believe the Young Americans for Freedom is a Hate Group." On February 13, 2007, two members of the Facebook group posted messages on the group's "wall" about possible ways to get YAF expelled from campus. One student wrote the following:

student organizations—especially those based upon political beliefs—have an interest in preserving their specific ideological character. CMU’s Students Against Discrimination, for example, should be able to deny membership to students advocating discrimination, and the Gay/Straight Alliance should likewise have the right to exclude homophobes. This necessity is even more pronounced in the case of YAF, since students hostile to its mission have explicitly and publicly sought to undermine the organization. Both YAF members’ constitutional rights and the continued existence of the organization at CMU require the university to allow the group to deny membership to students who do not support YAF’s principles.

FIRE urges Central Michigan University to act immediately to correct this ongoing injustice by allowing Young Americans for Freedom, and all registered student organizations at CMU, to choose members on the basis of their political viewpoints. FIRE further requests that CMU establish a clear policy stating that any group with an expressive purpose—be it religious or secular—may determine its membership on the basis of support for its mission.

FIRE hopes that this matter can be resolved amicably and swiftly, with fairness, common sense, and respect for the principle of free association. We are, however, committed to using all of our resources to seeing this matter through to a just and moral conclusion. Because of the urgency of this situation and the continuing violation of YAF’s constitutional rights, we request a response by March 30, 2007.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Tara E. Sweeney
Senior Program Officer

cc:

E. Gary Shapiro, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost, Central Michigan University
Bruce Roscoe, Dean of Students, Central Michigan University
Mike Owens, Associate Dean of Students, Central Michigan University
Tony Voison, Director of Student Life, Central Michigan University
Thomas H. Idema, Jr., Assistant Director of Student Life, Central Michigan University
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