

conclusively that the First Amendment does not tolerate the threat of censorship on campus.

But despite the unanimity of this precedent, research conducted by FIRE attorneys indicates that a majority of public colleges and universities nevertheless maintain policies that threaten First Amendment rights. For example, in 2014, FIRE reviewed policies governing student and faculty expression at 333 public institutions. Shockingly, 54.1% of the colleges and universities surveyed maintained at least one policy that substantially restricts freedom of speech. Disappointingly, at least one public college in Delaware—Delaware State University—is among them, as indicated on our website at thefire.org/spotlight.

I trust that you will find this result as unacceptable as we do. Freedom of speech on campus is of critical importance to the continued vitality of our democracy. As the Supreme Court of the United States recognized in *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, 250 (1957): “The essentiality of freedom in the community of American universities is almost self-evident. ... To impose any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation.”

FIRE is far from alone in our concern for the expressive rights of students and faculty at our public colleges and universities. This past August, Representative Bob Goodlatte, Chairman of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, sent letters to the presidents of 161 public colleges and universities across the country whose policies earned a “red light” rating from FIRE, indicating that they clearly and substantially restrict freedom of expression on campus. In his letter, Chairman Goodlatte asked each recipient “what steps your institution plans to take to promote free and open expression on its campus(es), including any steps toward bringing your speech policies in accordance with the First Amendment.”

Whenever possible, we work collaboratively with students, faculty, and administrators to reform policies that restrict protected speech on campus, and we have achieved significant success by doing so. For example, FIRE has partnered with campus community members to successfully eliminate or revise 57 speech codes at 31 different colleges and universities to date this year, guaranteeing the expressive rights of over 550,000 students.

In a related effort, we have also undertaken a campaign asking colleges and universities to adopt the free speech policy statement produced by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago earlier this year. The statement, a copy of which I have enclosed, guarantees “all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn,” and makes clear that “it is not the

Northern Kentucky University Board of Regents, 1998 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 11404 (E.D. Ky. July 21, 1998); *Corry v. Leland Stanford Junior University*, No. 740309 (Cal. Super. Ct. Feb. 27, 1995) (slip op.); *UWM Post, Inc. v. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin*, 774 F. Supp. 1163 (E.D. Wisc. 1991); *Doe v. University of Michigan*, 721 F. Supp. 852 (E.D. Mich. 1989).

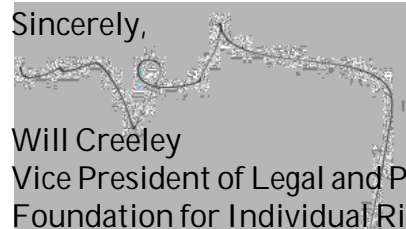
proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

We are proud of the progress we have made towards ending campus censorship by working directly with colleges and universities. But given the depressing pervasiveness of campus speech codes, we have also begun aggressive new initiatives in recent years to achieve First Amendment compliance. For example, in July 2014, we launched our Stand Up For Speech Litigation Project, a national effort to eliminate unconstitutional speech codes through targeted First Amendment lawsuits. To date, we have filed 10 lawsuits, three of which remain ongoing. The seven suits completed thus far have resulted in successful settlements and policy revisions restoring the free speech rights of almost 200,000 students and securing over \$350,000 in damages and attorney’s fees. FIRE will continue to file lawsuits against public institutions that shirk their constitutional obligations to their students and faculty until full First Amendment compliance is achieved.

Of course, were public colleges and universities to voluntarily reform their speech-related policies in favor of freedom of expression, the need for litigation would be obviated. Your leadership on this issue would be welcome. Not only would eliminating speech codes at Delaware’s public colleges and universities benefit the students and faculty who study and work at those institutions, it would send an invaluable message to all citizens about the importance of freedom of expression in our democracy.

My colleagues and I would be very pleased to discuss our concerns about speech codes on Delaware’s campuses with you further at your convenience. I very much appreciate your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,



Will Creeley
Vice President of Legal and Public Advocacy
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cc:

Paul Bennecke, Executive Director, Republican Governors Association
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