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## Free-speech group decries Marquette removal of quote

### University official took humorist's gibe from office door of assistants

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Marquette University came under attack from a national free-speech organization on Wednesday after a university administrator refused to allow a quote from humorist Dave Barry to remain posted on the office door of four teaching assistants.

*Advertisement* The quote: "As Americans we must always remember that we all have a common enemy, an enemy that is dangerous, powerful, and relentless. I refer, of course, to the federal government."

Stuart Ditsler, a teaching assistant and graduate student in the philosophy department, said he put it on the door of an office he shares with several other graduate students several weeks before classes started because, as a libertarian, he identified with the sentiment. He said that it's not uncommon for professors and teaching assistants to post cartoons or articles with political viewpoints on their doors.

But shortly after the quote went up, it was removed by the department's chairman, associate professor James South. In a Sept. 5 e-mail to Ditsler and the other teaching assistants, South called the quote "patently offensive." He said free-speech zones required him to take it down.

"I'm afraid that hallways and office doors are not 'free-speech zones,' " South wrote. "If material is patently offensive and has no obvious academic import or university sanction, I have little choice but to take note."

Ditsler said South's decision was made in conjunction with the department's executive committee, which is made up of faculty. Infuriated, Ditsler contacted the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, a non-partisan organization that takes up free-speech battles on college campuses.

FIRE sent a letter of protest to Marquette President Father Robert A. Wild on Sept. 27. When the organization had not received a response by Wednesday, it decided to release a public statement lambasting the university.

Marquette's student handbook protects the "right of the members of the university community freely to communicate, by lawful demonstration and protest, the positions that they conscientiously espouse on vital issues of the day."

Greg Lukianoff, president of FIRE, said prohibiting Ditsler from posting the quote violated this policy. Lukianoff said "patently offensive" is a term used to describe unprotected speech in the context of obscenity law, and that it is applied only to hardcore, pornographic language.

"I thought it was hilarious to characterize a fairly benign quote by a humorist as offensive," said Lukianoff, who also took issue with the university's use of free-speech zones, which he said were becoming increasingly common on college campuses.

South did not return a phone call or e-mail seeking comment Wednesday. The philosophy department referred questions to the university's press office.

Marquette spokeswoman Brigid O'Brien Miller said South's decision was primarily a workplace issue, not an issue of academic freedom, and that he was responding to complaints regarding what "some felt was offensive material."

She offered up a letter from Wild to FIRE dated Oct. 16, in which Wild said that because the quote was posted without attribution, "someone reading the quotation may not have understood the humor/satire of Dave Barry."

Miller said the posting might have been handled differently if it had included the attribution. She said there is no university policy dictating what can or cannot be posted on office doors.

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