

THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

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Espulsion reversed

By Malynda Fulton

— VALDOSTA — An ongoing battle between the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and Valdosta State University student Hayden Barnes, who was expelled in May 2007 after using pictures on Facebook.com to protest the construction of two parking decks on campus, ended Wednesday after the Board reversed the expulsion.

The reversal comes one week after Barnes, who was “administratively withdrawn” from VSU after President Ronald Zaccari deemed him a “clear and present danger,” filed a federal lawsuit against the university alleging constitutional violations. Barnes was recently notified of the reversal by his lawyer.

“FIRE (Foundation of Individual Rights in Education) commends the Board of Regents for beginning to right the horrendous wrong committed against Hayden Barnes simply for exercising his First Amendment rights at a public university,” FIRE Senior Program Officer William Creeley said in a press release. “But the case should never have come this far. Barnes’ lawsuit will ensure that VSU answers for its unconstitutional actions in court.”

Hayden Barnes, a 22-year-old paramedic who has attended VSU since 2005, was expelled after what he described as an attempt to generate debate on campus about the construction of two new parking decks on campus. He encouraged the idea of other, more eco-friendly alternatives such as university cooperation with the city on a bus system that could service the campus.

As part of his protest, Barnes posted flyers, sent letters to school administration and the university newspaper, the Spectator, and contacted the Board of Regents. In April, Barnes posted a picture collage on Facebook.com, which featured a picture of VSU President Dr. Ronald Zaccari, a parking deck with the VSU banner, an asthma inhaler and a bulldozer pushing the earth. The heading of the collage read, “S.A.V.E. — Zaccari Memorial Parking Garage.”

Because the heading suggested that the decks could be named “in memory” of Zaccari, the collage gained immediate attention.

On May 7, Barnes was notified of his withdrawal with a note from the president’s office, which had been slipped under his dorm room door. The letter recognized his actions as the reason for expulsion and referred to Barnes as a clear and present danger to the campus.

Barnes said that he was given 48 hours to vacate his dorm room, but was not informed of the deadline so remained locked out over the course of a weekend.

Barnes then filed an appeal to the Board of Regents with claims that proper university procedures were not followed in his dismissal and he was never given a proper disciplinary charge. He also asserts that he has been unjustly removed and stated that Dr. Zaccari never suggested that his actions were threatening in any of their previous meetings — just that they were embarrassing in nature.

Barnes, who previously mentioned plans of beginning classes at Kennesaw State University this semester, asked that VSU reimburse him for moving expenses and additional costs to attend Kennesaw.

Because the decision to reverse Barnes’ expulsion was made by the Board, VSU was unable to release a statement. After contacting the office of John Millsaps with the Board of Regents, The Times was informed that federal law prevents the Board from commenting on students.

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Photos



Hayden Barnes, who had been expelled from Valdosta State University, has seen his expulsion reversed by the Board of Regents.