



Boston College puts pressure on student newspaper

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By Kate Davidson, The Daily Free Press

(U-WIRE) Boston, Mass -- Editors at The Heights, the independent student newspaper at Boston College, expect administrators could respond as early as Tuesday to a letter from the paper's Editorial Board, which addressed college officials' efforts to impose restrictions on the paper as a condition for leasing office space from the school.

Administrators proposed "a little more than a dozen changes" to an existing lease, to be renewed at the end of December, according to Heights Editor-in-Chief Nancy Reardon, who called the stipulations "unprecedented" at BC. The changes would require the paper reject advertisements for alcohol, cigarettes or birth control, slash advertising rates for student groups, establish a code of ethics, appoint an ombudsman and install a faculty advisor and faculty oversight board.

BC spokesman Jack Dunn last week told The Boston Globe that many students and faculty have complained to administrators about "sexually explicit alcohol advertising" and "fairness and accuracy in Heights reporting."

Reardon said she and several members of The Heights Editorial Board have twice met with officials from the Office of the Vice-President of Student Affairs, and grew increasingly "frustrated" when negotiation talks stalled. The Heights sent a letter to administrators in mid-November outlining their concerns with the proposed changes, and hired an attorney for "consulting purposes," Reardon said.

Several newspapers reported over Thanksgiving break the college's move to impose restrictions, but school officials have yet to respond to the Heights letter.

"The Heights has always had a very good relationship with the administration," Reardon said. "We just can't compromise our identity as an independent newspaper."

Reardon said Heights editors expect they will reach an agreement with the college before their current lease ends in December.

"I don't think that members of the administration or the [Editorial] Board feel that it would be the best interests for either party to have The Heights move off campus," Reardon said. "I think we can all agree on that point."

Dunn criticized the paper for talking to the media during negotiations, according to the Globe article.

Reardon, who said the administration is convinced that Heights editors leaked the story to the paper, believes the negotiations became public after a Heights alumni dinner last weekend. Many of the

hundreds of alumni in attendance who had heard rumors of the contract changes wanted to know more, and Reardon said she felt it was necessary to address their questions. She said it is likely one of them may have gone to the press.

The Heights -- which was established in 1919 -- has been leasing office space from BC since it became independent in 1971. The paper agreed in 1978 to ban advertising for abortion procedures.

The paper hired an attorney from the law firm of Prince, Lobel, Glovsky and Tye without the intention of bringing the issue to court, but Reardon said the paper is prepared to let administrators deal primarily with its attorney.

"We've had two meetings with negotiators that have reached a dead end, so I think we will have our attorney play a greater role now," she said. "We have been independent for three decades and we just cherish the value of a free press so much that we just don't want to compromise that identity."

The Student Press Law Center, Center for Campus Free Speech and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education -- three non-profit, free speech advocacy organizations -- have offered their support to the paper, Reardon said.