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**'How about free speech for students, Mr. President?'
Foundation seeks Obama' help to fight university restrictions**

Posted: January 24, 2009
12:30 am Eastern

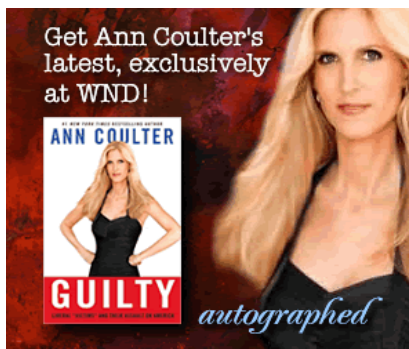
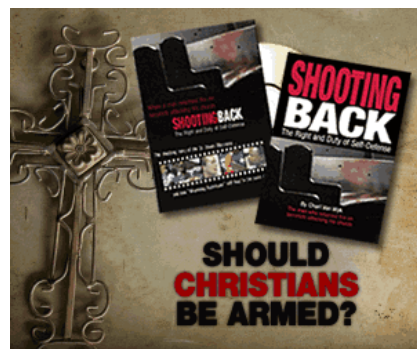
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An organization that seeks to uphold freedom of expression and conscience at colleges and universities nationwide is asking President Barack Obama for help.

In an open letter to Obama on the occasion of his inauguration this week, [The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) or FIRE, asked for his help in its battle "against college and university speech codes that are infringing on the rights of millions of our nation's college students."

"Millions of American students are being taught that colleges have the power to censor and punish speech that the Bill of Rights protects," said FIRE's president, Greg Lukianoff.

(Story continues below)



The group's letter stated, in part: "Failing to educate an entire generation about our constitutional ideals of liberty – and, still worse, actually teaching students that they have a duty to censor opinions with which they disagree – means that it will not be long before these illiberal attitudes result in severe consequences for our Republic."


The organization cited 10 federal court decisions "unequivocally striking down campus speech codes on First Amendment grounds from 1989 to 2008" but said the number of "unconstitutional restrictions on campus speech" actually has risen.

The group's 2009 survey of speech codes in academia, for example, found 77 percent of public colleges and universities maintain speech codes that violate the U.S. Constitution.


Worse yet are the actual examples of punishment for violating the codes, the organization said.

In a case at Valdosta State in Georgia, a student was expelled for "creating a satirical online collage to peacefully protest the university's plans to construct campus parking garages," FIRE's letter said.

A student-employee at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis was found guilty of



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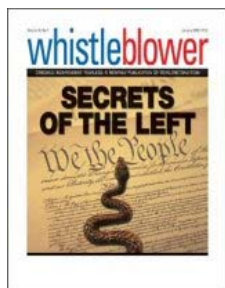
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racial harassment for reading a book with pictures of Klansmen on the cover – despite the fact that the book was celebrating the defeat of the Ku Klux Klan, the letter continued.

Another student, this one at Michigan State, faced punishment under a school e-mail policy for encouraging faculty members to weigh in on planned policy changes.

Will Creeley, FIRE's director of legal and public advocacy, said FIRE is asking for Obama's help in ending restrictions on student and faculty rights, "because our nation's institutions of higher education have seemingly ignored clear pronouncements from both the legislative and judicial branches."

"College harassment policies have inexplicably failed to adhere to the precise legal standard announced by the United States Supreme Court in Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, and Congress, while Obama was a U.S. senator, issued its second 'sense of Congress' resolution in just 10 years on the value of free speech on campus, but to little practical result," Creeley said.

Lukianoff concluded: "If President Obama simply speaks out against speech codes, colleges will get the message that they must finally begin to obey the law."

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