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Posted on Thu, Mar. 02, 2006

UW president recommends policy for resident assistants' meetings

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MADISON - University of Wisconsin System resident assistants could participate in or lead any meeting they want -- including Bible studies in their rooms -- so long as they did not coerce anyone into attending under a policy the school president proposed Wednesday.

President Kevin Reilly devised the plan in response to an outcry over a decision by the Eau Claire campus to ban a resident assistant from leading Bible studies in his dorm room.

The unwritten policy at UW-Eau Claire, which also banned RAs from leading political activities and sales events in their rooms, was suspended after resident assistant Lance Steiger complained. He said he was warned he could face discipline if he continued having Bible studies in his room.

Reilly said in a statement the proposal was meant to encourage resident assistants to participate in campus life while preserving an open environment for other students.

"The policy I'm recommending to the board balances the rights and responsibilities of RAs as students and employees," Reilly said.

Steiger, who has filed a lawsuit claiming the university violated his civil rights, did not immediately return a call from the Associated Press.

The system has been under fire from conservative groups and some lawmakers since news of Steiger's situation broke.

Campus officials had argued resident assistants must create an environment for fellow students that is free of pressure or coercion, but they suspended the policy anyway.

Resident assistants receive free room and board and stipends to supervise students on their dorm floors and are considered state employees.

Reilly created a task force to help write the policy in response to the controversy. The Board of Regents needs to approve the proposal for it to take effect systemwide. The board meets next week.

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