



Student's Lawsuit Compels UW to Lift RA-Led Bible Study Ban

By Jim Brown
March 29, 2006

(AgapePress) - A Christian resident assistant (RA) at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire has dropped his lawsuit against the school following its elimination of a ban on RA-led Bible studies. The UW's Board of Regents recently approved a policy allowing student dormitory workers to lead Bible studies.



Student Lance Steiger had sued the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire over its prohibition of RA-led scripture studies; however, as a result of the new policy, he has agreed to drop the case. In return, the school has agreed to pay Steiger's attorneys' fees and costs and hand him a symbolic damage award of \$1.

Steiger's attorney, Kevin Theriot with the [Alliance Defense Fund](#) (ADF), says the UW administration's change of heart had everything to do with the lawsuit.

In a "very clear case like this one of a violation of a student's free-speech rights," Theriot asserts, particularly "on campus where students are supposed to be learning about the American ideals of free speech -- especially religious speech -- the university has, really, no choice but to change course."

However, the university did not make that choice without a degree of pressure. Although other RAs had led discussion groups in their room on various secular topics, including feminism and sexual issues, school officials told Steiger and other RAs they were not allowed to hold Bible studies anywhere in their dorms, including their own rooms.

University officials originally justified the ban by suggesting that leading Bible studies would make RAs less "approachable" to non-Christian students. The school did not change its policy, even after the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education was contacted and sent a letter on Steiger's behalf to the administration explaining his rights.

It was when ADF lawyers representing the Christian RA filed suit that UW temporarily suspended its policy, saying it would strike a committee to study the matter. Ultimately, Theriot notes, the school "came to the right conclusion that the First Amendment protects religious speech and that this student's rights had indeed been violated." It is "high time," he contends, for universities like UW-Eau Claire to examine their policies and start focusing on "being constitutionally correct instead of politically correct."

Steiger's lawsuit and its resolution send "a clear message to universities nationally that are considering these type of politically correct restrictions on speech," the ADF-affiliated attorney points out. In effect, he says, this case "lets them know that organizations like the Alliance Defense Fund are going to react very quickly and that people are not going to

stand for second-class status when it comes to expressing their religious views."

Colleges and universities should not treat Christian students any differently than other students, Theriot insists, whether those students are religious or not. A student's speech in his or her dorm room is constitutionally protected free expression, he adds, and ADF is "very pleased" that UW-Eau Claire had decided to respect the First Amendment rights of its student RAs instead of restricting them.

Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for [American Family Radio News](http://www.americanfamilyradio.com), which can be heard online.

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