

America's Worst Colleges for Free Speech on Campus

Posted By [Robert Shibley](#) On September 13, 2009 @ 12:09 am In [Column2 09](#), [Culture](#), [Education](#), [Free Speech](#), [Politics](#), [US News](#) | [27 Comments](#)

With the beginning of the new school year, students and parents are flocking to newsstands to pick up the "America's Best Colleges" issue of *U.S. News & World Report* to see how their schools of interest stack up to the others. This year, they'll be getting another piece of information as well: [a list](#) ^[1] of America's worst colleges for liberty on campus. Students who are planning to attend Brandeis University, Bucknell University, Colorado College, Johns Hopkins University, Michigan State University, and Tufts University should think twice before attending those schools if they care about their fundamental rights.

This is the second year in a row that FIRE, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (where I work), has placed a full-page ad right next to the *U.S. News* rankings to warn students about what can happen to their liberties on campus and the colleges where these travesties are most likely to occur.

The ad features the shocking story of Keith John Sampson, a student and employee at Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), who was found guilty of racial harassment for reading a book that *celebrates* how University of Notre Dame students defeated the Ku Klux Klan in a 1924 street fight. The apparent basis for Sampson's offense? The book has a picture of a KKK rally on the cover, and he chose to read it while sitting at a table during work breaks, thereby offending other employees.

That's right. Administrators at an American public university actually judged a book by its cover. FIRE was able to help restore Sampson's good name, but the case remains a disturbing example of the out-of-control political correctness that is rife on too many campuses.

While Sampson's story is appalling, IUPUI is not on FIRE's Red Alert list of the "worst of the worst" offenders against liberty in America because it did come around once FIRE and the ACLU got involved. Bucknell, Brandeis, Colorado College, Hopkins, Michigan State, and Tufts did not even do that — and the stories there are nearly as shameful.

For instance, [Bucknell University](#) ^[2], the newest addition to the list, censored a conservative group's satire of President Obama's stimulus plan (the group passed out fake "stimulus dollars," which Bucknell apparently could not abide) and an "affirmative action bake sale" protest. After administrators shut down the affirmative action bake sale because — get this — the students were charging *less* than they said they would for doughnuts, the students reapplied to conduct the protest. However, they were told they could only discuss affirmative action in a debate format with the other side. Based on this principle, we can presumably expect President Obama to be surrendering the White House lectern to Michael Steele at his next press conference.

[Brandeis University](#) ^[3], which is now in its second year on the list, found a professor of nearly 50 years guilty of racial harassment for using the word "wetbacks" in his Latin American Politics class — in the context of criticizing the term. [Colorado College](#) ^[4], another offending institution two years running, found two male students guilty of sexually related "violence" simply for posting [a flyer](#) ^[5] that satirized [another flyer](#) ^[6] circulated by a student group. Their crime? The male students mentioned both sex and guns (separately) in their flyer making fun of the "Feminist and Gender Studies Interns" flyer.

[Johns Hopkins](#) ^[7] suspended a student for what it deemed to be an "offensive" Halloween party invitation posted on Facebook and then passed a repressive "civility" code over the protests of student leaders. [Michigan State](#) ^[8], currently in its first year on the list, found a student government leader guilty of "spamming" after she e-mailed a whopping eight percent of the faculty (in total, not even in one message) to encourage them to express their views on a proposed shortening of the school calendar.

And [Tufts University](#) ^[9] found an entire student newspaper guilty of "harassment" for publishing two

pieces, one satirizing affirmative action and the other commenting on Islamic Awareness Week. The [latter of these two pieces](#) ^[10] included only factually verifiable information about Islam, as well as quotes from the Koran.

That's right. At Tufts, quoting actual facts that some people would rather not know is considered "harassment," giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "an inconvenient truth."

All six of these universities will be admitting freshmen this year, many of whom will have no idea that they are surrendering their fundamental rights to those who have shown absolutely no concern for them. Thanks to FIRE's advertisement in *U.S. News*, however, at least some of them may know going in that administrators at their schools have decided that the fundamental rights that they thought they would find at an institution of higher education — fundamental rights for which men and women fought and died — are less important than making sure that those on campus who are fortunate enough to hold the most "popular" views feel as comfortable and unchallenged as possible.

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URLs in this post:

- [1] a list : <http://www.thefire.org/index.php/article/10963.html>
- [2] Bucknell University: <http://www.thefire.org/article/10735.html>
- [3] Brandeis University: <http://www.thefire.org/article/8983.html>
- [4] Colorado College: <http://www.thefire.org/article/9312.html>
- [5] a flyer: <http://www.thefire.org/index.php/article/9085.html>
- [6] another flyer: <http://www.thefire.org/index.php/article/9086.html>
- [7] Johns Hopkins: <http://www.thefire.org/article/8146.html>
- [8] Michigan State: <http://www.thefire.org/article/10023.html>
- [9] Tufts University: <http://www.thefire.org/article/8147.html>
- [10] latter of these two pieces: <http://www.thefire.org/index.php/article/8043.html>

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