

Free speech an issue at CC after satirical flier is prohibited

By [BRIAN NEWSOME](#)

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Chris Robinson would see the racy feminist flier The Monthly Rag posted in bathrooms at Colorado College, and thought it "begged to be satirized."

So he and another student penned The Monthly Bag under the pseudonym "the coalition of some dudes." Their flier was laced with male stereotypes and political jabs and came out shortly after the Rag's latest edition earlier this year.

Both newsletters contained vulgarity befitting a bathroom stall. But The Monthly Bag was taken down by college staff the day it came out. Robinson and his friend, who has not been named publicly, were later told they violated CC's conduct standards. They were not punished, but were asked to use the matter to discuss free expression on campus.

What began as dueling fliers escalated into a freedom of expression debate.

The issue has caught the attention of the national advocacy group, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, which was contacted by Robinson and accuses CC of having a double standard. It's also led to forums on free speech on the CC campus.

The satirical flier is the latest in a series of controversies at the small downtown liberal arts college involving student speech and behavior:

- In December, two CC hockey players were suspended for sexual misconduct and lying, which one of them said was for engaging in a threesome with a woman. No police report was filed.
- That same month students held a sit-in to protest anti-gay graffiti on the door of a dormitory resident assistant. Also, President Dick Celeste admonished students for vulgar chants at hockey games that included gay innuendo.
- In October, four students set off a controversy after they wore blackface as they attempted to represent a TV show that has black characters.

For several years students in the Feminist and Gender Studies Program have produced The Monthly Rag and posted it in men's and women's bathrooms, Editor Beth Kancilia said.

In the latest issue, there is an excerpt from "The Bitch Manifesto" by feminist writer Joreen, an explanation of "packing," in which a woman creates the appearance of a penis under the clothes, and trivia about a toothed vagina and fears of male castration.

The Monthly Bag contained an excerpt from Teddy Roosevelt's "The Man in the Arena;" an explanation of a sexual position described by Men's Health magazine; "chainsaw etiquette;" a definition of "political radicalism;" and trivia about the 2,000-meter firing range of a .50-caliber sniper rifle.

"There are certain viewpoints which are absolutely not welcome at Colorado College," said

Robinson, a senior studying political science. He said he intended the newsletter about "guy stuff" to counter "radical feminist propaganda."

The college pulled the fliers because they could have been taken as a threat, said spokeswoman Jane Turnis. They were anonymous and contained a reference to a sniper rifle, and they were posted two weeks after a college shooting in Illinois. Administrators received calls from people who feared there "might be" a threat," she said. Celeste, in a letter to students and staff the afternoon the flier appeared, said "The Monthly Bag" was "demeaning."

The students admitted writing the flier after Celeste sent a message asking the writers to come forward. Administrators determined they had violated CC's code of conduct. They say CC violated its commitments to free expression.

FIRE, which made CC the lead topic on its Web site on Tuesday, rejects the charge the flier was threatening.

"The Monthly Bag was so clearly a satire and so clearly nonviolent that any reasonable reader would have laughed rather than felt threatened," said Adam Kissel, director of Individual Rights in Education, adding that whether or not people thought it was objectionable should not be a reason to suppress it.

FIRE has published copies on its Web site.

Kancilia said she deplored the content but did not believe it should have been removed because some might find it offensive. She conceded that many readers would find her newsletter, The Rag, offensive, but that unpleasant content has a place.

She said she believes the freedom of expression debate, though, detracted from more important issues the satire raised about oppressive stereotypes and gender equity.

Robinson said he does not dislike feminists. He said he wanted to take on a campus culture that claims to support free speech but chooses which causes get to have a voice. To fulfill administrators' request to create a dialogue, Robinson wrote an op-ed piece for the student newspaper, The Catalyst.

In a written public statement, Celeste defended the college's commitment to free speech, pointing out that the students were not punished and noting that the incident has "encouraged further dialogue about freedom of speech issues on campus."

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