



Ramona E. Romero  
Vice President and General Counsel  
Tel: 609.258.2511  
ramonar@princeton.edu

**Office of the General Counsel**  
New South Building, Fourth Floor  
Princeton, New Jersey 08544  
Tel: 609.258.2500  
Fax: 609.258.2502

September 23, 2024

Via Electronic Mail

Mr. Dominic Coletti  
Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy  
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression  
510 Walnut Street, Suite 900  
Philadelphia, PA 19106  
[dominic.coletti@thefire.org](mailto:dominic.coletti@thefire.org)

Re: Response to September 19, 2024 Letter to Princeton

Dear Mr. Coletti:

I write in response to your September 19, 2024 letter to President Eisgruber regarding *The Dispatch Advisory Opinions* podcast hosted by the University's American Whig-Clisophic Society ("Whig-Clio") on September 16, 2024. While we welcome constructive feedback when based on accurate information, your letter was based on inaccurate and unsubstantiated claims reported by the podcast. Neither the podcast hosts nor FIRE made any effort to verify the facts with the University.

Specifically, *Advisory Opinions* erroneously reported that Whig-Clio was prohibited from using University space to record the podcast because of concerns about political activity inconsistent with the University's tax-exempt status and that this advice was communicated to Whig-Clio by the University's counsel. (Indeed, the host claimed that "They [Whig-Clio] spoke to a lawyer at the school. Princeton University counsel told them that they were not allowed to have us on campus.") These reports are false. Your letter of September 19 omits the reference to counsel but repeats that "Princeton informed Whig-Clio that the organization could not reserve campus rooms to host the podcast because the use of campus resources would jeopardize the university's tax-exempt status."

I do not know how the podcast host or FIRE came to believe this, but I do know that Whig-Clio was not advised by any University lawyer concerning the podcast, either directly or indirectly. Indeed, nobody consulted any lawyer in my office about the recording and no University counsel would have provided the reported advice because we know well that neither federal law nor University policies on political activity would prohibit the recording on campus;<sup>1</sup> had either Whig-Clio or the podcast's hosts checked with my office, we would have told them as much.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., <https://rrr.princeton.edu/university-wide-regulations/15-guidelines-relating-tax-exempt-status-university-and-political>; <https://conferences.princeton.edu/event-services/external-groups>.

Moreover, after conducting appropriate due diligence, the University has found no evidence that any University official advised Whig-Clio that they could not host the podcast on campus because of University concerns pertaining to partisan politics and/or its tax-exempt status. Although I assume that it is possible that there was a misunderstanding between the students organizing the event and their administrative advisor, there is absolutely no evidence of any intent to deny Whig-Clio “access to generally accessible resources on the basis of expressive content” as your letter seems to imply. Misunderstanding or not, however, we would have expected that both the journalists involved in the podcast and FIRE would have made some effort to contact the University to verify the facts.

Your letter correctly notes the University’s commitment to free expression. That commitment, articulated in our Statement on Freedom of Expression,<sup>2</sup> is core to Princeton’s values and guides its policies and practices. Speakers of all backgrounds and viewpoints -- including politicians -- are routinely welcome on our campus. To offer just a few examples, Princeton has hosted Dorian Abbot, Ted Cruz, the Dalai Lama, Mohammed el-Kurd, Riley Gaines, DeRay Mckesson, Vic Mensa, Derek Kilmer, Charles Murray, Rick Santorum, Ilya Shapiro, Terri Sewell and Amy Wax, and no invited speaker has been shouted down or denied the right to speak at the University since the 1970s. We would have welcomed the *Advisory Opinions* hosts on our campus. And they are still very welcome.

Princeton has requested that *Advisory Opinions* correct the record. My understanding is that Whig-Clio is prepared to clarify that they were not advised by University counsel concerning the recording of the podcast. Now that you have the facts, we expect that FIRE will also issue a correction and remove from its website the case overview and letter to Princeton regarding this matter. Your decision to publish these materials without awaiting our response (which your letter requested by September 26) only compounds the harm the podcast’s mistaken representation has already done to my office’s credibility and reputation, as well as the University.

Sincerely,



Ramona E. Romero  
Vice President and General Counsel

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<sup>2</sup> <https://rrr.princeton.edu/university-wide-regulations/11-university-principles-general-conduct-and-regulations> (1.1.3).