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For Immediate Release
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VAN ROY'S VIEWS

Bible study is Free Speech, UW Eau Claire Should Back Off its Policy

The University of Wisconsin Eau Claire has come under heavy fire recently for their unwritten policy prohibiting Resident Advisors (RAs) from exercising their freedom of speech if it relates to anything ideological such as politics or religion. This is a bad policy, perhaps even unconstitutional and it should be repealed.

UW Eau Claire's troubles began last year when Lance Steiger, a senior RA, was ordered to cease holding bible studies in the basement of his dorm. UW Eau Claire further warned that he would face disciplinary action if he held another session. Essentially, UW Eau Claire was claiming that Lance and other RAs were 24/7 employees and that they could not engage in ideological speech even when the RAs were supposed to be on "personal time."

I think that this is a terribly flawed policy. As long as Lance wasn't using his position of authority to convey his views or to compel other students to join his meetings, he should have been allowed to meet within the confines of the dorm. After all, the dorm is his home. The same freedom should apply to any RA regardless of their creed or political ideology.

What is further alarming about UW Eau Claire's policy is that it seems to indicate that RAs must leave their 1st Amendment rights at the dorm door when they take the job. Yesterday in fact, UW Eau Claire expanded its bible ban to include prohibiting RAs from "leading, organizing or recruiting students" for any organization or activity in their dorms. This newly declared and enforced policy flies in the face of rational thought, personal liberty, and common practice on our UW campuses.

It is inappropriate for a government entity to deny anyone their constitutional rights in this way. This week Congressman Green sent a letter to UW System President Kevin Reilly demanding that the policy be rescinded and several of my Assembly colleagues and I sent a letter to the Attorney General requesting an opinion on the constitutionality of UW Eau Claire's policy. I certainly hope that the UW reconsiders their policy. Our universities ought to be cultivating free thought and speech not oppressing them.

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