
CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY SUED FOR VIOLATING FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS

by **Bryant Jackson-Green** JULY 9, 2014



The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, or FIRE, filed a lawsuit against Chicago State University, or CSU, last week, accusing the university of “[engaging] in an ongoing campaign to silence ... criticisms of how the university is run” when it tried to shut down an independently operated faculty blog. Since at least last year,...

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Since at least last year, CSU's administration has been in open conflict with faculty members who contribute to "CSU Faculty Voice." The blog is known for criticizing alleged cronyism, waste and the generally questionable management decisions of the university. In November, lawyers for the administration demanding the blog be taken down, claiming it used their trademark without permission and violated their standard of conduct because the posts were insufficiently "civil," apparently thinking that their feelings trump basic First Amendment rights.

Problems continued to escalate after the writers refused to cave to the administration's threats. In January, CSU lawyers sent another letter claiming that the blog's name and design implied it was affiliated with the university. But even a cursory glance at the website shows this isn't true; the blog clearly has ".blogspot" in its URL address and lacks the ".edu" designation that every college or university maintains. And why would a university formally sponsor or approve of a blog that openly criticizes it?

Understandably fed up with the harassment, two of the blog's contributors filed this lawsuit to defend their First Amendment rights. As a public university, CSU is obliged to respect the First Amendment just as much as any other government institution, which means faculty and students alike have the right to openly criticize the university when they don't agree with its policies.

As taxpayers who fund Illinois public education, we should be able to expect more professional behavior from these administrators. Hopefully this lawsuit will send a message to CSU and other schools that education, not petty censorship, is what we're paying for.

Image source.