

Remarks to the Faculty Senate by David Fifer, Student Body President
November 5th, 2007
South Room, Keen Johnson
Eastern Kentucky University

Chair Eakin, and members of the Faculty Senate, the time you've given me today is a privilege, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to bring to your attention a matter that is of great concern to the Student Government Association.

For the past several years- certainly as long as I have been a student here, the Office of Student Life has been requiring that any fliers, banners, posters, etc. that people wish to hang be literally given a stamp of approval before going up. This stamping policy prohibits certain types of information from being posted. Namely, postings that deal with non-University related events and information.

This policy is almost universally loathed. The SGA office receives frequent complaints and questions from students *and* community members, who all express their frustration at what they consider to be censorship. Under Student Life's policy, students are not allowed to hang, for instance, a flier advertising the fact that their band is playing an upcoming show off-campus, and small business owners are not allowed to offer students products, services, and even employment opportunities.

The reason I am here before *you* today, is that when SGA asked the Director of the Office of Student Life about the basis of this policy, she and her superiors pointed us towards the Faculty Handbook. Specifically, to the paragraph that is included on your agenda- the paragraph in the Administrative Policies section, entitled "Bulletin Boards and Counter and Table Tops," that prohibits, "commercial or promotional items, not related to University programs or services," from being posted. The Director of Student

Life further explained that her office is obligated to enforce all University policy regardless of where it is found, including the Faculty Handbook.

That principle is absurd. First and foremost because the Office of Student Life does not enforce many University policies found elsewhere. But more to the point, it seems clear that the Faculty Handbook is not a policy that is designed to be enforced University-wide. After all, we have a Student Handbook that governs student behavior and policy. Now, those two publications might have some areas of overlap, but nowhere in the Student Handbook will you find any language governing fliers or dealing with specific posting policies. It seems clear to us that the Office of Student Life is inappropriately enforcing the Faculty Handbook upon students.

This is problematic, but so too is the paragraph itself. Now at first glance, this policy seems pretty sound. It seems to establish the idea that University bulletin boards are for University stuff. But we feel that such an idea is overly simplistic, and the language of the paragraph is overly-broad. We believe that this paragraph, and the policy it has promulgated are depriving students of the opportunity to see a wide variety of information that really is of benefit to them.

Recently, SGA went around campus collecting postings that had been hung “illegally” according to this policy. Items that were in fact denied posting privileges by the Office of Student Lie in accordance with this paragraph, but were surreptitiously hung anyway. I have a few examples here....[show examples].

These items are definitely in students’ interests. These postings are certainly commercial in nature, but they also represent opportunities. Opportunities for

employment, political action, scholarships, academic tutoring, and places to live. Yet they are all prohibited according to the current language of the Faculty Handbook.

In talking to folks who were around when this policy was originally written, I've learned that this paragraph was designed to protect students from commercial enterprises that were kind of predatory in nature- credit card companies and such that would plaster campus with fliers and pressure students to buy their product.

The first point I would raise here is that times have probably changed. These kinds of companies no longer rely so heavily on paper fliers given the advent of the internet, Facebook, and other digital public mediums. The policy is probably antiquated for that reason.

Secondly though, I feel confident that I speak on behalf of most of my peers when I say that we don't want that kind of protection. We don't want protection from information. We want the University to protect us from crime, because we are not always able to do that ourselves. We want you to protect us from, say, Pandemic Flu, because we lack the ability to do that for ourselves. But we don't want you to protect us from information, because we can *always* think for ourselves.

In that way, this paragraph does both you and I a disservice. It does me a disservice because it assumes that I can't decide for myself, or perhaps that I shouldn't decide for myself, what information has merit and value and which does not. And so as a result, it deprives me of a wide array of information.

But it does you a disservice too, because it also suggests that as educators, you are unable to help me develop the skills necessary to make such decisions. I don't need a

University policy telling me what is “good” and “bad” information, because I trust you....to teach me how to make sense of even the most bewildering of ideas.

So I’m here today on behalf of the Student Government Association to ask you for two things. First, to pass a resolution articulating the truism that the Faculty Handbook is not intended to be applied to students. We have a Student Handbook that has been developed to cover the student body. We feel as though the fact that Faculty Handbook should only apply to faculty speaks for itself. But apparently the Office of Student Life does not, and we ask for your help in reminding them.

Secondly, I’m asking you to pass a motion to repeal the Bulletin Board paragraph, and strike it entirely from the Faculty Handbook. It’s overly broad, it does not benefit the University community like it may have used to, and it’s time to put in place language that is a bit more intellectual and precise. We ask that you repeal it, and give SGA a chance to contribute to the formulation of a policy that is sound. But while we’re working, let’s get this antiquated language off the books. Let’s give independent thought and the idea of a truly free marketplace of ideas, a chance.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I’d be happy to take any questions that you might have.