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TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY BANS JUICYCAMPUS

Open Letter From JuicyCampus Founder

In Monday's edition of the Tennessee State University student newspaper, TSU's VP for Student Affairs, Michael Freeman wrote a letter to the student body.

Assuming Mr. Freeman is not in the habit of writing letters to the entire student body via the campus newspaper, he did so on Monday because he had a dirty confession: "we blocked access to a website called 'juicy campus'." This decision meant that TSU had just become the first public university to ban JuicyCampus.com from its servers, joining the ranks of the Chinese government in internet censorship, and spitting in the faces of everyone who believes in free discourse online.

University administrators are probably acting in what they believe to be the best interests of their students. They're just misguided, and missing the big picture. The most significant threats to free speech (in the U.S. at least) tend to come not from tyrants who openly question the value of the First Amendment, but from well-meaning busybodies who want to protect peoples' feelings—a mission that is generally incompatible with free speech.

The idea of banning JuicyCampus.com has been considered, and flatly rejected, at the nation's premier universities (including Yale, Duke, Princeton, Harvard, and many others). These universities decided that limiting free speech would be fundamentally incompatible with their educational missions, and that censorship was a slippery slope that they did not want to be on. Instead, administrators at many top universities seized the opportunity to educate their students. All over the country, discussions have taken place with regard to what is and is not appropriate to discuss in a public forum, and how students should react when they see something they disagree with online.

This approach stands in stark contrast with TSU's decision, which was to censor the speech of its own students. In a truly Orwellian manner, the University chose to limit students' abilities to read and write to an un-moderated message board online, because their speech was reflecting "negatively" on TSU. Freeman's position would seem to be that his students cannot be trusted with their First Amendment rights, perhaps believing that they are too immature or irresponsible.

Perhaps though, they are just under-educated on this issue. But, unlike his colleagues at top universities, Mr. Freeman has abdicated his responsibility for educating those students, and in doing so has disgraced both his University and his State.

Because TSU's decision seems to violate its students' First Amendment rights, there is some question as to how long their ban will remain in effect. Students and free speech advocacy groups are already discussing legal action.

JuicyCampus believes that the answer to bad speech is good speech, not censorship. To that end, JuicyCampus encourages students who disagree with certain comments to reply to those comments with additional information and/or their own opinions. Everyone has an equal voice on JuicyCampus.

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