



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on September 23, 2010

Louisiana University Bans Political Emails

Grambling State University (GSU) in Louisiana has banned its students from using the university's email server to email "campaign solicitations," claiming it is a violation of Louisiana law which bans the institutional endorsement of a campaign. This comes as a disappointment to politically active students who reside in a state where ballots are to be cast for lieutenant governor, seven congressional seats, and a Senate seat currently held by Republican David Vitter.



Grambling's email use policy states that the school's email system cannot be used "for the creation or distribution of any disruptive or offensive messages, including offensive comments about race, gender, hair color, disabilities, age, sexual orientation, pornography, religious beliefs and practice, political beliefs, or national origin."

As the nation moves into campaign season, GSU has instructed the following to its students via email: "Individuals who receive political campaign solicitations via university email are advised to delete these emails upon receipt. DO NOT FORWARD campaign solicitations using university email as this implies your support for the candidate and may be viewed as utilizing university resources for solicitation purposes, a violation of state policy."

Students who violate the ban are "subject to disciplinary action."

Fox News reports, "Orders to withhold forwarding election-related emails were made in July, but when the public university's school year started, free speech advocates and at least one political candidate questioned whether the policy would be withdrawn."

Independent Mayoral Candidate Robert C. Wiley filed a complaint against the university, with the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union and student advocacy group Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE).

Wiley explains, "We would hope the university would make it clear what student involvement [in politics] should be. Just like they made it clear in an email blast, you should right your wrong and make it known you have a right to participate in elections and endorse candidates. You don't have to sneak and hide and the university should make it known."

FIRE wrote a letter to the University asserting that the ban was a violation of the students' First Amendment rights. The letter was sent on September 1 and requested a response by September 15, but received none.

FIRE's Senior Vice President Robert Shibley asserts, "As the national dialogue increasingly focuses on



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the upcoming elections, administrators at Grambling State have made the unconstitutional decision to shut down the conversation on campus. The First Amendment protects such core political expression, and as a public university, GSU cannot lawfully prevent students and faculty from speaking their minds about the electoral choices facing our country.”

However, a University spokeswoman, Vanessa Littleton, contacted Fox News to emphasize that the school “does not prohibit students or employees from political expression.”

Littleton added, “In light of the questions presented by FIRE, the university is communicating on this matter with legal counsel and the governing board. To ensure the Grambling State University community is fully aware of the university’s policy, email use policies are being redistributed.”

According to FIRE’s website, “The University’s invocation of ‘state policy’ misinterprets applicable law in Louisiana. Article X, Section 9, of the Louisiana Constitution provides far more specific, narrow limitations on political activity than does the broad ban.”

Since the university failed to respond to FIRE’s letter, FIRE hopes they can gather enough public support to help protect the students’ First Amendment-protected rights. “We hope public support for those rights will persuade [GRU] to abide by Louisiana state law,” contends FIRE’s Vice President Adam Kissel.

Wiley affirms the importance of resolving the issue, given the importance of the upcoming elections, in both 2010 and 2012.

“We have to get students involved in this electoral process. If we don’t get students involved, then higher education will always be treated like a stepchild.”



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