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Dear Fellow Bucknellian,

On behalf of the Conservatives Club, I'd like to welcome you to campus. I hope that you've been enjoying your Bucknell experience so far. Bucknell is a wonderful institution—one I'm proud to attend.

However, there is one thing Bucknell doesn't advertise that I think you should know about: our speech code. Our administration has decided that while you're here, you cannot exercise your free speech rights.

Of course, Bucknell can take away your rights if it wants to, since it's not a public university. But let me ask you this: did you come to Bucknell knowing that you would be *less free* than your friends at, say, Penn State? Somehow, I don't think so. And I doubt that the folks in Admissions told you that being a Bucknellian involves checking your First Amendment rights at the door. Rather, they probably said that Bucknell values free inquiry and free speech, blah, blah, blah.

There's a name for that: false advertising.

One of the many problems with our speech code is that the administration refuses to call its restrictions on speech what they are. Instead, they are placed in policies we *must* have—those banning harassment. The most egregious example is the "Student Handbook Documents" booklet that was mailed to you a few weeks ago. Check out page 12, at the very top, where it says that "engaging in conduct which alarms or **seriously annoys** such other persons" is harassment, for which you may be punished.

Think about that. Do you think you should be punished if you inadvertently "seriously annoy" someone? How many times a day are you "seriously annoyed?" Don't 8 AM classes "seriously annoy" you?

Or, take the "Bucknell Guide About Bias-Related Harassment and Violence." Some aspects of the policy are very reasonable—such as "bias-related graffiti." Graffiti is bad, whether "bias related" or not. But look what the policy lumps in with graffiti as "examples of bias-related action as understood by the university":

- "disparaging or condescending remarks about a person's nationality, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation"
- "verbal abuse, including **anti-gay jokes** and disparaging remarks about one's race or language"

That might sound okay in principle, but it's not. It's vague, overbroad, and a violation of your rights. What's "disparaging" or "condescending" to one person is not so to another. And since when do people need to be protected from the punchline of a joke? Ask a lawyer—that's not what "harassment" really means.

You can check out this policy online at www.bucknell.edu/deanofstudents/Bias-RelatedHarassment.shtm. You might also like to peruse Bucknell's "Guide About Sexual Harassment." That policy takes the extraordinary step of lumping the following in with *real* sexual harassment:

- "disparaging or condescending remarks about a person's gender or sexual orientation"
- "verbal abuse including **sexist jokes, and inappropriate remarks about one's body or clothing**"
- "sexual innuendoes made at **inappropriate times**"
- "subtle pressure for unwanted sexual activity"

The Guide About Sexual Harassment is also available online—at www.bucknell.edu/deanofstudents/SexualHarrassment.shtm. It includes lots of great examples, too.

Of course, you need to judge for yourself whether or not you think the Bucknell administration has any business banning all the kinds of speech that it does. I, as you might guess, think those people ought to have better things to do than figuring out and outlawing what's "condescending" or "disparaging" to each of us.

But it appears they don't. They wrote these policies, and they have enforced them.

Doesn't it bother you that our deans evidently think it's their job to tell us what we can and cannot, should and should not, say on campus? Do you think you need your hand held every time you feel "offended?"

Last I checked, we're adults. We can be forced to fight and die for our country in foreign lands. Yet, on the campus of our own university, we're not allowed to say anything that *someone* might feel offended by.

Don't get me wrong: harassment should definitely be illegal on campus, as it is in all 50 states. But "annoyance" or "offense" is not the same as harassment. Saying it trivializes the real thing.

For clarity's sake, let me give you some examples of the sort of things that, it seems to me, would be illegal under our speech code:

- "The stupid Americans went into Iraq without the U.N." ("disparaging or condescending remarks about a person's...nationality")
- "The Bible says homosexuality is a sin." ("disparaging or condescending remarks about a person's...sexual orientation")
- "Guys are pigs." ("sexist jokes")
- "That girl looks hot in those black pants." ("inappropriate remarks about one's body or clothing")

And that's not even the half of it. I have no idea what "sexual innuendoes made at inappropriate times" are—is there a certain time of day when we are or are not supposed to make sexual innuendoes? And what is "subtle pressure for unwanted sexual activity?" How are you supposed to know it's "unwanted" before you ask? Have the people who wrote that ever been to a frat?

You can easily find out more about this issue on the Conservatives Club's website, www.bucknellconservatives.org, and from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a non-partisan group based in Philadelphia, at www.thefire.org. If you read the info on those websites, particularly in past issues of THE COUNTERWEIGHT, the BUCC's magazine, which include specific examples of what students have been prosecuted for, I think you will be appalled too.

And if you feel the same way I do about the speech code, get involved with *any* group on campus that fights for free speech. No matter what your politics are, if you even have them, this is an issue you should care about. Because *anything* you say that *someone else* finds "offensive" might land you in front of the campus court.

Again, I hope you are enjoying the beginning of your Bucknell career—and that you will similarly enjoy the rest of your time here. But also please bear in mind that as great as our school is, there are some areas in which it needs serious improvement. I hope you'll agree that the existence of a speech code is one of those.

Best wishes,

Charles Mitchell
President