

Va. Tech Revises Funding Policy Harming Faith-Based Groups

Virginia Tech has revised its student activity fee policy so that faith-based student groups can receive funding for religious worship and similar activities.

Previously, faith-based groups were denied access to the funds for these activities even though all students are required to pay activity fees. A letter from the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) prompted the change.

“The university is supposed to be the marketplace of ideas. America’s colleges and universities should recognize the constitutionally protected rights of **religious students** just as they do for all other students,” says ADF Litigation Staff Counsel Matt Sharp.

“We commend Virginia Tech for taking prompt action to change its policy to allow funding for these important religious activities of faith-based student groups, as the Constitution requires.”

Virginia Tech’s Student Activity Fee Allocation Policies and Procedures originally stated that “[o]rganizations will not be provided funding to support religious worship or religious proselytizing.”

After ADF informed the university that its policy violated the **First Amendment**, the university removed the restriction from its policies.

As the ADF letter states, Virginia Tech’s policy makes student fees “broadly available to a multitude of student groups expressing a virtually limitless range of views, yet bans the

use of these funds for 'religious worship or religious proselytizing.'"

The letter explained that the U.S. **Supreme Court** has made clear that "a public university must distribute these student fees in a manner that is consistent with First Amendment protections."

Last year, ADF won a significant lawsuit at the University of Wisconsin in which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit concluded that the university could not deny student activity fee funds to a Catholic student group on the grounds that the group held to a religious viewpoint.

The ADF letter concludes that "a public university should invite robust debate and dialogue on every conceivable issue, be open to the widest possible ideas and views, and adopt policies that encourage the fullest possible exercise of First Amendment freedoms."

ADF sent the letter to Virginia Tech as part of its nationwide effort to change unconstitutional policies at public universities. Virginia Tech joins UCLA and several other universities that have made changes in response to ADF letters.