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## Citrus College trustees rescind free speech zones

By Terry Webster , Staff Writer

The Citrus College Board of Trustees Thursday rescinded two policies that led to a federal lawsuit over free speech.

The board's action does away with free speech zones on campus and restrictions on student participation in demonstrations.

"We wanted to err on the side of caution," Edward Ortell, board president, said after the meeting.

College President Michael Viera said there will be a committee of students and staff organized in the fall to design new policies.

On May 20, student Chris Stevens filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California that opposes the college's free speech areas.

When Stevens tried to organize a pro-America rally and a rally to protest Gov. Gray Davis' education budget, he was told he would have to remain in the free speech areas. Groups that are recognized by the college don't have that restriction.

The lawsuit maintains the policy violates freedom of speech by restricting free speech to three areas on campus.

In perhaps an ironic twist, the board barred Stevens from speaking during the public hearing portion of the meeting.

College officials passed over Stevens, 20, saying they did not receive a written form for his request to address the board.

Stevens said he had called the president's office and indicated he would like to speak at the special meeting. He was the only person who wanted to address the board.

After the meeting, college officials directed Stevens to a table, where forms for requests to address the board were located, telling him it may "help him in the future."

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Richard McKee, president of the California First Amendment Coalition, said he was surprised by the board's action.

"Certainly speaker cards are used when there are large numbers of people, but otherwise they serve no purpose,' McKee said. "The Brown Act says they can make reasonable rules to facilitate public discussion. To restrict it is contrary to the law.'

Prior to the lawsuit being filed, the board ignored Stevens' request for a hold on the policies.

"This is a stall tactic and all it does is give greedy attorneys a chance to bill,' Stevens said. "The college is not in a financial position to put this off and continue to spend money. This really does not resolve the issue.'

Though it may be moot, a court hearing to place a preliminary injunction on the policy while it is under review is set for today in downtown Los Angeles.

On May 27, U.S. District Judge William J. Rea refused to issue a temporary restraining order. College officials had said they were reviewing the policy and had placed a temporary hold on it.

Stevens' attorney, Carol Sobel, is part of the legal network for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a Philadelphia-based organization concerned with protecting free speech issues on school campuses.

The lawsuit is part of what FIRE is calling a national campaign to end "unconstitutional censorship at America's public college and university campuses.'

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