

Friday, October 31, 2003

The Behrend Beacon

University newspaper confiscation draws fire

by Philip Walzer
The Virginian-Pilot

The confiscation by Hampton University officials of the latest issue of the student newspaper could pose "an enormous setback" as the journalism school seeks to expand and attract top-notch faculty and students, said the school's new director.

But the incident could initiate a healthy discussion on the value of free press and offer students a valuable real-life experience, he said. "It is a good lesson, and it's not going to be the last time in their careers when a publisher tells them to do something they don't want to do," said Chris Campbell, director of the university's Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications.

Two university employees confiscated thousands of copies of the Hampton Script from the newspaper office on the morning of Oct. 22, student editors said.

The journalism school does not oversee the newspaper. The paper - scheduled to be distributed during the university's homecoming this weekend - featured a front-page article about recent health violations at Hampton's cafeteria. Most have since been corrected. The story, Campbell

said, carried the headline: "Cafeteria cleans up act, stays open."

Acting President JoAnn Haysbert had asked the editors to print her letter defending the university on the front page, but they placed it on the third page, with other letters.

Haysbert and the student journalists met Wednesday, said Campbell, who attended the session.

"Her very strong feeling was that the Script is not a student newspaper, but a university newspaper," he said. "She is ostensibly the publisher, and when a publisher asks for a letter to be put on the front page, you put it on the front page. It was very simple to her."

Haysbert did not return calls on Oct. 22 or 23.

Campbell said: "I think the university administration absolutely feels that students should not have an independent voice. I think students should have an independent voice."

The editor of the paper, Talia Buford, did not return calls. The paper's sports editor, senior Jamar Hudson, said, "We felt that her memo did not carry enough news value or weight to be on the front page."

"We understand that the president is chief executive of-

ficer," Hudson said. "However, as a student newspaper, we feel our voice should be heard."

Campbell said the journalism school has a \$10 million commitment over the next decade from the Scripps Howard Foundation, an arm of the E.W. Scripps media company. That helped open a new journalism building last year.

Judith Clabes, the president of the foundation, is away from her office this week. But Campbell said he received an e-mail from her on Oct. 22 expressing support for the students.

He said he did not expect Scripps to reduce funding because of the incident.

This isn't the school's first journalistic controversy.

Last year, the director of the journalism school, Charlotte Grimes, resigned, saying President William R. Harvey discouraged students from investigative journalism on campus. Harvey said that wasn't true.

Harvey is on a yearlong sabbatical, and Haysbert is overseeing the university. Campbell took over as Grimes' successor last summer.

St. Louis University backs off demand that students remove flag

by Ron Harris
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

St. Louis University students Tom Lundeen and Nicholas Payne never thought that flying a flag, particularly the American flag, could cause such controversy. But it has, pitting them and an Ohio congressman against university president the Rev. Lawrence Biondi and other university officials.

Payne, 21, a business major from Cincinnati, and Lundeen, 21, a business major from Cleveland, had been given until Oct. 24 to remove the Stars and Stripes from outside their on-campus apartment, or have it removed for them and possibly be fined.

The flag has been draped across the metal railing of their third-floor balcony since shortly after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The students were told by school officials to remove the flag about a month after they hung it, because, school officials said, it violated school policy on flying any flag and other paraphernalia from dormitory balconies.

But then for more than two years, they never heard another word about it.

"The issue just kind of disappeared," Payne said.

At least until Oct. 14. That's when they were hand-delivered a sternly worded letter warning

them to take the flag down by 5 p.m. the next day or face the consequences. After they didn't, they got a second letter a few days later, their final warning, telling them it had to be down by Friday or they would be fined.

For help, Payne wrote his congressman, Rep. Steve Chabot, R-Ohio, chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Constitution. Chabot fired off a letter to Biondi asking the school to reconsider.

"I was surprised when I learned of the university's decision to prevent Mr. Payne from flying his American flag from the balcony of his on-campus apartment," Chabot wrote. "I respectfully urge you to give Mr. Payne full consideration in resolving this matter consistent with all applicable laws and regulations."

But on the morning of the deadline, Biondi remained firm.

"It is not a question of the flag, or even a student's patriotism," he wrote in a letter to Chabot. "Instead, it is a general policy on our campus meant to assure an atmosphere advantageous to all ideas and belief systems, an appearance of cleanliness and avoidance of a cluttered appearance because of assorted objects hanging from balconies, including clothing, towels, blankets, lights, personal flags, etc."

But as the 5 p.m. deadline came, the university

relented, at least for now.

"In light of the fact that he went almost two years without them hearing from us again, and the flag was allowed to continue to fly, I think we owe him the consideration to take a look at how this has been handled," said Jeff Fowler, the university's spokesman.

"Will we look at the policy again? I don't know. There probably needs to be dialogue between the student and the university, and maybe there can be a resolution that pleases everybody."

At issue is a university policy that states: "Nothing is to be hung from balcony/patio, including but without limitation to flags, strands of lights, wind chimes, or any other items. Violation may result in confiscation of such items for the remainder of the academic year."

School officials say the policy goes back at least four years, long before the terrorist attacks.

Fowler said the policy initially prohibited anything from hanging but did not specify any particular items.

The policy was put into place for two reasons, he said, safety and appropriateness.

"Some of the apartments are high, and if something fell and hit someone down below, somebody could be hurt," he said. "And there's also the issue of liability."

Second is that something inappropriate could be hung, something that would be offensive. Clearly, most people would have something appropriate, but what about something that isn't? What do you do about that, where do you draw the line between what can be and what can't be?"

But Lundeen, Payne and other students say they believe the policy regarding flags was put into effect this year. They say they looked in the student handbook in 2001 to see if flags were banned and couldn't find any reference to them.

"It's odd that they say they've had this policy for four years, yet this is the first year that they decided to pick to enforce it," Payne said.

The issue of flags has come up at other universities. For example, Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, has banned the flying of American flags from dormitory windows, citing safety hazards and a school policy that generally bans the display of items outside windows.

Payne said he's pleased that the university has decided to reconsider its position, but he's not optimistic about the outcome.

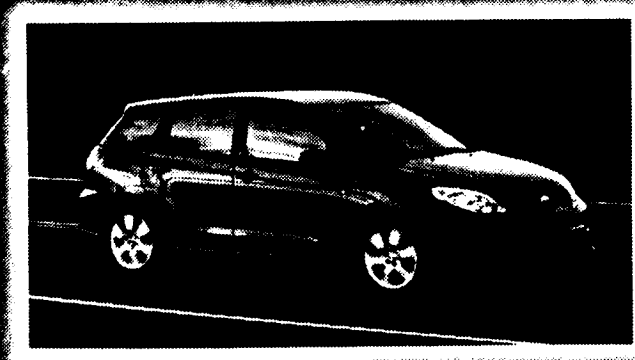
"I don't think they have my best interest at heart," he said. "If they had been more willing to work with me earlier, I might be less apprehensive."

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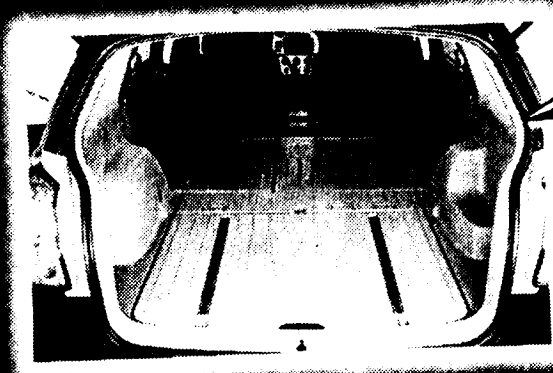
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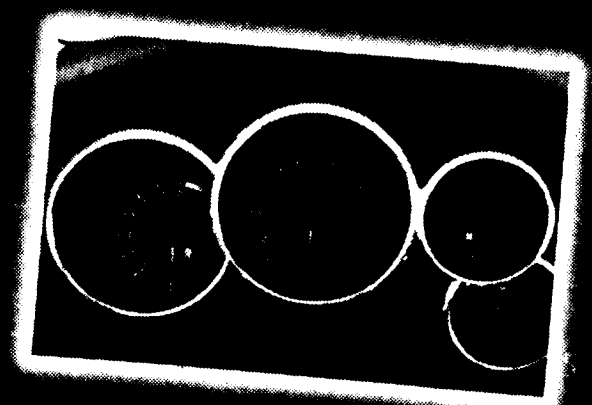
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