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BRAVE NEW SCHOOLS

College bars Christian from sharing faith

Religious expression not 'cultural, educational, social or recreational'

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A man barred from speaking about his Christian faith on a New York state college campus filed a civil-rights lawsuit claiming violation of his free-speech rights.

Officials at Ulster County Community College in Stone Ridge, N.Y., told Greg Davis of Indian Lake, N.Y., that he needed to file a facilities use permit application to speak about his faith with students in a public, grassy area on campus in October 2003.

But when he did so, his application was denied because the school claimed his desired religious expression does not constitute a "cultural, educational, social or recreational" activity.

Attorneys with the Arizona-based Alliance Defense Fund are representing Davis.

"This is simply another example of overzealous school officials attempting to marginalize people of faith," said ADF Senior Legal Counsel Nate Kellum.

Kellum said the lawsuit is necessary "to protect this man's constitutional rights and ensure that the school does not wrongly discriminate against speakers with a religious perspective."

"The Constitution does not say that speech is only free if it meets certain arbitrary categories developed by public officials," said Kellum. "But it's ridiculous nonetheless to say that religious expression does not fall into one of those categories."

At first, Davis said, he was told by a school official he could speak about his faith on campus. But later the same day he was told he would need to submit a facilities use permit application even though he did not intend to make use of any school buildings.

Eventually, Davis left campus when another school official informed him his religious expression was prohibited altogether.

Davis then filed the permit application that later was denied.

The lawsuit [pdf file], Davis v. Katt, was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of New York, Albany Division.
