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# NKU has opinion boundaries

## Reminds students that free speech activities limited to certain space

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

Whether it's protests over a lack of Black History Month events or anti-abortion crosses being pulled up on campus, NKU has had no shortage of opinions.

But not all students are aware that there are rules for protests on campus.

After some students protested the lack of Black History Month events on campus in February, they were told they weren't following school policy because the protests didn't take place in the school's free-speech zone - an area on campus designated to protests and rallies.

**ADVERTISEMENT** "All the approved protest areas are out of view of the administration building," said Akosua Favors, a senior who participated in the Black History Month protest. "They are very unwelcoming to any ideas that don't agree with our government or the university. This has always been the pattern at NKU."

Favors is the president of Students Together Against Racism.

Approval for student organizations to protest is given by Dean of Students Kent Kelso.

"In my tenure, I don't think I have declined any group or perspective," Kelso said. "What I have done is limit them to specific areas of campus and specific time frames."

Federal court rulings have affirmed an institution's right to regulate the time, place and manner of demonstrations so long as content is not changed. Kelso cited as an example his denial of activities in front of classroom buildings, but allowing the same protests in the public forum areas.

The February protest took the form of interrupting a meeting where the Rev. Damon Lynch was speaking. Shortly after that, Kelso advised the students of NKU's Administration Regulations, which detail the free-speech area.

Kelso also noted that the group protest called itself "United Student Taskforce" but was not a registered student organization.

Favors admitted that the group was not registered but described it as a coalition of campus organizations such as STAR, Common Ground, the NAACP, the Afro-American Studies Club and the Sociology Club.

"If they had been a registered organization, they would actually have more rights," Kelso said.

Free speech areas are common at universities. They are used to help maintain order and to prevent interruptions of planned events such as the one with Lynch.

"When I was originally read this document I was under the belief that the entire campus was bestowed with the right to peaceably assemble, voice opinion, and allow the opinion of others to be heard as well so I was a bit perturbed by this policy," said Barry Aishton, a sophomore philosophy major.

NKU defines its free-speech area as "the northwest end of the University Center facing Parking Lot A and partially bounded on the north side by Nunn Drive."

Shortly after giving notice of the free speech area to the protesting students, the university broke ground on the new student center.

Construction spilled over into the free speech area, which is now surrounded by a chain-link fence.

"We have moved the area toward the front door of the UC by the windows that look into the game room," Kelso said. "Once construction is finished, we will determine where an appropriate area will be for the future."

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