



University bans controversial links

By Declan McCullagh
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The University of California at San Diego has ordered a student organization to delete hyperlinks to an alleged terrorist Web site, citing the recently enacted USA Patriot Act.

School administrators have told the group, called the Che Cafe Collective, that linking to a site supporting the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) would not be permitted because it violated federal law.

In a letter to the Che Cafe Collective, UCSD University Centers Director Gary Ratcliff said the hyperlink violated a law that bans "providing material support to support terrorists." Ratcliff warned that the student organization would face disciplinary action if it did not immediately remove the link to FARC.

"The concern of the institution is that this could be interpreted as a violation of the law," Ratcliff said in an interview Wednesday. "What we're trying to be is pro-active here. If the FBI decided to pay attention to this matter, the repercussions would go way beyond their group because we're providing network services."

The law in question is one section of the USA Patriot Act, signed by President George W. Bush last October, which outlaws providing "material support or resources" to foreign terrorists who have been placed on a State Department list. Material support is defined as money, lodging, training or "communications equipment."

As of Wednesday, Che Cafe members had not removed the link from the Burn.ucsd.edu site, which is maintained by the organization. Che Cafe did not reply to interview requests, but said in a letter sent to Ratcliff last week that he

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reply to interview requests, but said in a letter sent to Ratcliff last week that he does not "have the authority to unilaterally impose sanctions based on your opinion that we violated university policies."

The State Department calls Colombia's FARC a terrorist group because it has kidnapped and murdered U.S. citizens.

Because the FARC, also known by its Spanish name Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, appears on the State Department's August list of 34 terrorist organizations, the university says it has no choice but to ban hyperlinks. The law applies to "financial resources, personnel, communications facilities," Ratcliff said. "The information on the site, if you look at it, wasn't viewed as news by the institution, but information the site meant to build support for these organizations. It wasn't an impartial, balanced presentation with analysis or interpretation. These were sites that were trying to generate sympathy."

A taste for anarchy

Che Cafe is a medley of a vegan collective, a cafe that serves organic food, and a confederation of self-described radical students. Its mission is to advance "radical social change," and it keeps links endorsing anarchist sites including Raise the Fist, which the FBI raided in January.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) said UCSD's reading of the USA Patriot act was laughably censorious.

"I think their interpretation of materially supporting terrorism is dreadfully overbroad and a massive threat to freedom of speech," said Greg Lukianoff, FIRE's director of legal advocacy. Lukianoff said FIRE was willing to represent the Che Cafe against the university, which must abide by the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech because it is a government school.

"All you'd have to do is declare someone a terrorist organization to prevent someone from knowing who the enemy is or what they stand for," Lukianoff said. "That's not how democracy works."

When asked whether the university would prohibit a faculty member or the student newspaper from linking to an alleged terrorist group, UCSD's Ratcliff said he was not sure. "Those are good questions to ask," he said. "As it relates to this law, it would depend on a case-by-case situation." The UCSD university attorney did not immediately return phone calls.

In April, the Groundwork Books collective, another UCSD student organization, got in trouble for linking to a different terrorist group, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is also on the State Department's list. It has removed the link.

Last week, Ratcliff sent the Groundwork Books collective a letter saying that its members must write an essay saying they understand they broke the law and

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