



September 14, 2026

Dear Members of the University of Tampa Board of Trustees:

The Student Code of Conduct opens by stating that the trustees, faculty, and administration of the University of Tampa are dedicated to honesty, community, and citizenship, and that the trustees affirm the university's authority to protect its institutional interests. We write because a provision now being enforced under that authority has greatly infringed upon the rights of UT students, and while we have received a guarantee that the university would pause enforcement for three weeks, we require further assurance that the board will not permit such an egregious encroachment on civil liberties to occur on its watch.

Effective August 1, 2026, the staff of the Division of Student Affairs amended Sections XIV.E and XIV.F of the Student Code. The amendment makes membership in an unrecognized organization a disciplinable offense on its own. A student who joins such a group, holds office in it, or helps it plan an event may be referred to the student conduct process with no allegation that the student harmed anyone. On August 28, 2026, the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life notified two fraternities in writing that their student members will be referred. We are also aware that the parents of a female student received a similar threatening letter from the university because one fraternity recognized her as a special friend to the organization, a bizarre and unsettling move that suggests Student Affairs staff are investigating the private lives of students enrolled at their institution.

On September 11, 2026, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) wrote to President Dahlberg, by mail and electronically, to say the policy restricts students' freedom of speech and association and, in its words, "must be rescinded." FIRE has asked for a substantive response by the close of business on September 25, 2026. Its letter notes that FIRE worked with the University of California, Santa Barbara to revise a comparable ban, and it has offered to help this administration do the same at no cost.

We raise it with you because the questions FIRE identifies are institutional rather than operational. The university tells its own students that every student has the right to a "constructive learning environment, where the open and honest exchange of ideas may freely occur." The principles of accreditation published by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges address an institution's recognition of students' rights to open expression and the exchange of ideas. A rule that makes association itself punishable sits fundamentally opposite both.

The harms of this rule are not limited to unjustly targeting fraternities. On its face, it reaches any organization that recruits university students and functions as a club or society without recognition. This is especially troubling because it means the University of Tampa's roster of administrators may decide on a whim to suspend the civil liberties of its students for their decision to affiliate or socialize in any way with an organization these individuals may deem objectionable.

FIRE rightly reads this edict as capable of reaching a local church, a community choral society and a private social club, all of which it names. "Material Support" is defined to include promotion and event planning, so a

student who shares a post about a philanthropic event falls under the jurisdiction of the rule. Whether such students are charged depends on administrative restraint and preference rather than on what the Code says, and a rule that does not tell a student of ordinary intelligence what is prohibited is a rule the university should not be enforcing.

It is also worth knowing whom this reaches. One of the two organizations notified on August 28, 2026, Alpha Sigma Phi, has never faced a misconduct allegation at the university. The other has not been recognized by University of Tampa since 2018, as a result of a disputed and grossly disproportionate outcome and sanction, when current freshmen were in elementary school. Neither notice cites any current conduct concern. The stated basis is only status.

The university already has the tools for the conduct it says concerns it. Section XII prohibits hazing whether or not an organization is recognized. Sections II and VIII reach alcohol and drugs. Section XV reaches harm to persons. Those provisions govern behavior. Sections XIV.E and XIV.F govern association.

The administration has also published this rule three different ways. The Fraternity and Sorority Life webpage tells students that discipline may follow affiliation combined with conduct contrary to the Code. Section XIV.E makes mere affiliation a violation. And the August notice states that participating students will be referred, describing the amendment as prohibiting student involvement with unrecognized organizations generally, which is broader than the text the University adopted.

The Fraternity Forward Coalition does not question the University's right to decide which organizations it recognizes, though it wishes that it had the good judgment to recognize more groups to expand greater opportunities for student involvement on campus. However, that is the University's call and we do not contest it. What we question is the discipline of students for private association off campus in a clear violation of their civil liberties and federal protections for those enrolled at institutions of higher education.

We ask the Board to do four things: inquire into the process by which this amendment was adopted, and whether legal counsel was involved in reviewing it; ask whether the amendment was reviewed at the board level before it took effect; ask the administration whether it intends the rule to reach religious, political and civic groups, since the text plainly does; and direct that no student be charged under Sections XIV.E or XIV.F before the Board has satisfied itself that the provision reflects the institution's commitments and before the administration has answered FIRE.

We reserve the right to pursue all legal remedies to ensure that our members' civil liberties are safeguarded from bureaucratic overreach on any campus and have done so successfully at institutions across America, like Harvard University and the University of Maryland. To that end, we have retained legal counsel and hired a Washington, D.C.-based public relations firm to, if necessary, vigorously contest this new policy in both state and federal court, as well as the court of public opinion. Please keep us apprised of any efforts to rein in this department and prevent the implementation of this unjust and unconstitutional provision.

Sincerely,
Fraternity Forward Coalition