



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 24, 2023

Michigan State Students Sue Over Being Forced to Fund Professor's Political Cause

Two Michigan State University (MSU) students are suing university officials and a former professor who forced them, as a condition of completing a required course, to buy memberships in a left-wing website she runs.

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) attorneys filed a [federal lawsuit](#) Thursday on behalf of MSU sophomores Nathan Barbieri and Nolan Radomski, both of whom attend the university's Broad College of Business and, in the spring semester, took a mandatory business-communications class led by then-MSU professor Amy Wisner.



Ken Lund/flickr

According to their complaint, while Wisner had previously taken “a conventional approach to teaching this course,” in the fall 2022 semester she “re-designed her course to reflect her newfound political views” of sexual libertinism and opposition to “patriarchy.” In addition, she mandated that all students purchase \$99 memberships in the Rebellion Community, “an expressive organization established and controlled by” her. With approximately 600 students enrolled in the course each semester, Wisner’s organization was raking in roughly \$60,000 every time she taught the course. What’s more, the memberships renew each year automatically, so Wisner could, in theory, soak her former students indefinitely.

Although the Rebellion Community website, and Wisner herself, claimed that she did not personally benefit from the membership fees, Wisner appears to have used the funds she mulcted from her students — who comprise virtually the entire membership roster of the Rebellion Community — to purchase an RV. According to her GoFundMe page that has raised a mere \$2,250 in voluntary contributions toward the cause, she intended to take “an RV roadtrip [sic] around the United States to co-create communities of rebels committed to doing the work” and “igniting action at the local level.”

All of this was in keeping with MSU policy, which grants professors wide discretion in the content of their courses and in the materials they may require students to purchase, even if said purchases redound to their own benefit. The policy merely states that instructors are “expected to forgo any royalties or payments ... and are encouraged to donate to a charity or fund that would benefit students.” Of course, as the lawsuit points out, “What would ‘benefit students’ has no objective meaning or guidance.”

Apparently, as far as Wisner was concerned, whatever benefited her cause also benefited her students. In a Facebook post describing the Rebellion Community as “a safe place to coordinate our efforts to burn everything to the f—ing ground,” she stated that “100% of membership fees are donated to Planned Parenthood.”

Barbieri and Radomski, both Christians, quite naturally objected to this. “While Plaintiffs enjoy testing



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the mettle of their own views by exploring other ideas and perspectives in the context of their coursework — indeed, they believe this is part of the value of higher education — they do not wish to financially support the speech of others that contradicts their views, and they do not wish to become members of groups organized for the purpose of promoting messages that contradict their views,” explains their lawsuit.

They, and many other students, complained to university officials, who eventually placed Wisner on leave, assigned another instructor to complete the spring course, and refunded the students’ membership fees.

While this resolved the immediate problem, it did nothing to prevent such a conflict from recurring; the policies that Wisner exploited remain in place. Moreover, it allowed Wisner, who was not ordered to return the membership fees or cancel the automatic renewals, to continue using her ill-gotten gains to further her political causes.

The students are asking the court to address these matters by (1) declaring Wisner’s actions, and the policies under which they took place, violations of their rights to freedom of speech and religion and (2) imposing appropriate remedies.

“University professors can’t force students to finance and support political advocacy groups that express messages they disagree with. Nathan and Nolan simply want to get a business degree without being compelled to pay membership fees that will be donated to Planned Parenthood or support speech that directly contradicts their religious beliefs,” ADF attorney Logan Spena said in a press release. “Michigan State officials have violated the First Amendment and federal civil rights laws by authorizing professors to force students to support speech antithetical to their deepest values and faith.”



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