

# U.Va. revises Lawn room policy to restrict signage permitted on doors

The revision comes after some alumni and community members criticized signs posted on Lawn room doors last fall

By Eva Surovell  
March 2, 2021



The revision comes after signs posted on Lawn room doors last fall containing profanity such as “F—ck UVA,” as well as criticism of the University’s history of enslavement and inaccessibility, prompted calls for removal by some alumni and community members.

Photo by [Danny Bass](#) | [The Cavalier Daily](#)

The University has implemented additional restrictions on the signage Lawn room residents can put on their doors following controversy over signs posted last semester. According to the addendum to the Terms and Conditions for Lawn and Range Residents, Housing and Residence Life will affix two message boards to each Lawn room door, to which residents are permitted to attach messages or paper materials.

“Any materials placed on the message boards must fit within the four corners of each message board and cannot extend beyond the outer edges of any such board,” the addendum reads. “Paper materials or other items may not be placed on Lawn or Range room doors, the doorway, shutters, or the brick areas outside the room except on the message boards as described above.”

Previously, Lawn and Range residents were permitted to have one 1.5 ft by 2 ft pin board outside of their room for displaying paper materials, according to Coy.

The revision comes after large signs posted on Lawn room doors last fall containing profanity such as “F—k UVA” and criticizing the University’s history of enslavement and inaccessibility prompted calls for removal by some alumni and community members.

University President Jim Ryan [addressed](#) the controversy in October via a written [statement](#) in which he called the signs “deeply disappointing.” University Counsel Tim Heaphy [confirmed](#) that the signs were protected by the First Amendment, though Ryan said that the University would consider implementing additional restrictions on the signage permitted outside Lawn rooms before the start of the next academic year.

“Last semester, President Ryan pledged to review University policy on the display of signs on Lawn room doors and find a better balance between protecting the First Amendment rights of the student residents and preserving the unique and public character of the Lawn for members of our community and visitors from all over the world,” University spokesperson Brian Coy said. “[The addendum] clarifies and refines existing University policy on the size of signs that can be displayed on Lawn room doors.”

In a collective statement to The Cavalier Daily, the Lawn residents who posted “F—k UVA” signs on their doors this fall said that it is “particularly malicious” that the University will celebrate [record-breaking numbers of more diverse students](#) who are Lawn residents next year while “simultaneously enforcing unprecedented policies that limit free speech.”

The residents also noted the disproportionately adverse effect the policy’s revision will have on students of color living on the Lawn, noting that it will result in “increased surveillance” which will in turn “inherently harm and endanger the most marginalized and vulnerable students in this space.”

“Though we initially made it a goal of ours to center only the content of our signs as opposed to conversations surrounding free speech, this policy is undeniably biased on those very grounds,” the statement said. “This policy displays the extent to which the University is selective about who can exercise free speech and the content of that expression. Evidently, BIPOC students and allies cannot be critical of the University while simultaneously living on the Lawn.”

Residents noted that it is not clear “how these message boards will be utilized nor how these purposely vague guidelines will be enforced” and disputed the notion that their signs were not mindful of the University’s unique history and position as a World Heritage site.

“Our signs, more than any other effort of this University, were honest and realistic about the violence of this institution and this space,” the statement said. “We have and will continue to be more mindful about this space – in its history, meaning, and position – than the University of Virginia has ever been. ”

Third-year College student Ryan Alcorn, third-year council president and future Lawn resident, said that he thinks the decision reflects “an ugly history” of the University silencing unconventional student protests on the Lawn.

“This decision follows calls for a higher standard of civility for public displays on the Lawn,” Alcorn said. “I would encourage those making such demands to recall that students regularly run around naked and drink to excess on this UNESCO heritage site, and consider that the Lawn is not a lifeless museum but a place where young people come to enjoy and express themselves.”

Student Council passed a resolution in October denouncing the potential blanket ban on Lawn room signs and called on the University to stop any consideration of additional regulations that would restrict the rights of Lawn residents to express themselves peacefully.

“President Ryan has made himself clear — ‘As long as I am president, the University of Virginia will not walk away from Thomas Jefferson,’” the resolution reads. “If this is the hill our president chooses to die on, so be it. But he would do well to remember the founder’s words — ‘I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.’”

## University removes sign on Lawn room door, claims it “advocates violence”

This is the second time the Lawn room resident's sign has drawn the attention of University administration

By Erin Rafferty  
March 19, 2021



HRL noted that if this or a similar sign were to be posted on the student's door in the future, she will be subject to further disciplinary action, including removal from University housing.

Photo by [Danny Bass](#) | The Cavalier Daily

Employees of the University's Facilities Management Division were directed to take down a paper sign from the door of a fourth-year Lawn resident last week, according to a letter from Housing and Residence Life which the student posted on [Twitter](#) March 12. The tweet also included a photo of the sign alongside the letter and a caption saying “f—k uva.”

The sign displayed an image of the Rotunda — surrounded by flames and draped with a white hood resembling that of the Klu Klux Klan — in addition to a grim reaper holding a scythe and a police belt with the initials “UPD.” The words “Burn It All Down” were written below the Rotunda. Underneath the image was a quote from Kwame Ture — “In order for non-violence to work, your opponent must have a conscience” — followed by the phrase “UVA has none!”

This is not the first time the student has had a [sign](#) removed by the University. In October, there was controversy surrounding a sign condemning white supremacy that contained the phrases “F—k UVA.” and “UVA Operating Cost: KKKops, Genocide Slavery, Disability, Black and Brown Life.” The student’s sign led to other Lawn residents posting “F—k U.Va.” signs on their Lawn room doors as well.

University President Jim Ryan described the October sign as “deeply disappointing” in a written [statement](#), though the University acknowledged that the signs were protected by the First Amendment. Following criticism of such signs from several alumni and community members, the University implemented additional [restrictions](#) on signage for incoming Lawn residents. Next academic year, residents will only be permitted to attach messages or paper materials to two message boards affixed to each Lawn room door by HRL.

In last week’s letter to the student, HRL said that the new sign advocates physical violence because the phrase “Burn It All Down” directly encourages a violent act.

“The quote included on the sign suggests that ‘nonviolence’ is ineffective against UVA, which further encourages violence,” HRL wrote.

The letter added that the student’s signs appeared in an area which was previously a site for race-based violence in August 2017, so there is greater potential for incitement by the sign’s words and images. As a result, HRL claimed taking down the sign was consistent with the First Amendment as it was necessary to safeguard the community.

“The threatening nature of this Lawn sign is particularly apparent in the face of recent history, including the fear and intimidation brought to the Lawn by torch-bearing rioters on August 11, 2017, the violence that continued the following day, and the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol that resulted in several deaths,” HRL wrote.

HRL noted that if this or a similar sign were to be posted on the student’s door in the future, she will be subject to further disciplinary action, including removal from University housing.

University spokesperson Brian Coy stated that University leaders came to the decision that the sign advocated physical violence and must be removed after consulting with legal counsel. He claimed that “University leaders have been vigilant in their protection of free speech in this community, even when such speech is critical of the University.”

“When speech goes beyond mere advocacy of a particular point of view and directly promotes physical violence, the University can and will take action to restrict it,” Coy said. “Removal of those signs is both necessary to protect community safety and consistent with our obligations to protect free speech.”

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education — a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to defending freedom of speech and due process rights on America’s college campuses — sent a [letter](#) to Gay Perez, assistant vice president of student affairs and executive director of HRL, raising concerns over the University’s response to the sign.

In the letter, Adam Steinbaugh, director of FIRE’s Individual Rights Defense Program, wrote that the University’s response violates the First Amendment because “the display does not amount to unprotected incitement” and thus does not fall under the limited classes of speech which are excluded from protection by the amendment.

Steinbaugh said that the student’s display “does not evidence an intent to direct others to engage in lawless action” and is not likely to result in imminent lawless activity. Additionally, Steinbaugh noted that the history of violence in Charlottesville should not dilute the student’s right to free speech.

“Instead, that violence — during which a white supremacist murdered a protester — should stiffen the University’s resolve to protect speech, not to use it as a basis to curtail expressive rights,” Steinbaugh said.

Katie Kortepeter, Media Relations Associate for FIRE, wrote in an email to The Cavalier Daily that the letter to University administration was a reminder that the student’s sign constitutes protected expression and a demand to rescind the removal of the sign.

“This is the second time in six months that her signs have caused a stir, but FIRE will continue to speak out to defend the First Amendment rights of students at U.Va. and around the country,” Kortepeter said.

The letter from FIRE requested a receipt of a response from the University no later than March 17 that would confirm it will not require that the student’s display be removed.

# Current Lawn residents express concern about the University's sign restrictions

The recently revised policy decreases the size of the signs permitted on Lawn room doors

By Amanda Pallas

September 10, 2021



Previously, Lawn and Range residents were permitted to have one 1.5 ft by 2 ft pin board outside of their room for displaying paper materials.

Photo by Ava MacBlane | The Cavalier Daily

Residents of the Lawn are criticizing the University's new [signage restrictions](#) for limiting and censoring the ability of Lawn residents to freely express themselves on their doors.

The [revised policy](#) restricts residents to signage that fits within two message boards posted on each Lawn room door. It was [implemented](#) by Housing and Residence Life following controversy over large signs posted last [fall](#) and [spring](#) criticizing the University's history of enslavement and inaccessibility. Previously, Lawn and Range residents were permitted to have one 1.5 ft by 2 ft pin board outside of their room for displaying paper materials.

"Last year, President Ryan pledged to review University policy on the display of signs on Lawn room doors and find a better balance between protecting the First Amendment rights of the student residents and preserving the unique and public character of the Lawn for members of our community and visitors from all over the world," University spokesperson Wes Hester said in a statement to The Cavalier Daily.

Fourth-year College student LaNija Brown said the reduced size of the message boards is a way of silencing Lawn room residents.

"Free speech' really means speech that upholds the good name of the school," Brown said. "To me, this says that the University is scared to be held accountable by tourists, passerbys, students, etc. Holding tours all over the Lawn where one of the main talking points is how the school supports student advocacy — meanwhile [tour groups] have no idea they are literally surrounded with examples of U.Va. doing the opposite."

Brown said the restrictions are "very hypocritical" given the Board of Visitors' [endorsement](#) of a [commitment](#) to free speech last June. The statement "unequivocally affirms" the University's dedication to free speech, pledging that all views, beliefs and perspectives should be considered without interference.

"The University is going to choose it's own reputation, regardless of what they claim to uphold," Brown said.

[The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) — a nonpartisan foundation which works to "defend and sustain the rights of students and faculty at America's colleges" — is also disappointed with the University's new policy, according to Laura Beltz, director of policy reform for FIRE.

"The new message boards policy places solely content and viewpoint-neutral restrictions on signs, which are permissible under the First Amendment," Beltz said in an email to the Cavalier Daily. "Legally permissible or not, though, we're disappointed to see the University limit this avenue for student expression."

Like Brown, Beltz also noted that the revised signage policy for Lawn residents does not quite adhere to the University's goal of affirming their commitment to free speech.

"Though this policy does not ban signs altogether, it certainly narrows students' ability to express themselves on their message boards," Beltz said. "We hope the University will reconsider the policy change."

Joshua Franklin, fourth-year Engineering student and Lawn resident, said that while it is understandable that the University would not want some displays — such as misinformation — in "such a public space," censoring Lawn students is not the correct approach to take.

"Throughout history, censorship has led to negative outcomes," Franklin said. "Of course U.Va. would not want negative U.Va. messages on the Lawn, but since the person has a platform to share their opinion, that space should be encouraged."

Alex Moreno, fourth-year College student and Lawn resident, also expressed his dissatisfaction with the new policy.

"While it is understandably undesirable for the U.Va. administration to allow signs on Lawn room doors that are critical of the University, I don't think that the current restrictions are the right venue to pursue," Moreno said. "Restricting the size of the messages instead of restricting the contents of the messages on the doors seems to serve really no good purpose for either the University or for us Lawn residents."

# U.Va. removes Lawn resident signs posted in protest of new HRL signage policy

Camp's sign, which takes up most of the door, included the full text of the First Amendment

By Ava MacBlane

September 23, 2021



While she is the first Lawn resident to directly protest the policy, Camp is not the first to critique the policy – residents previously called the restrictions “very hypocritical” and said they served “no real good purpose.”

Photo by Ava MacBlane | The Cavalier Daily

Fourth-year College student Emma Camp posted a sign on her Lawn room door Friday — Constitution Day — in protest of the University’s [newly implemented policy](#) which restricts the size of signs allowed on Lawn room doors. The sign contained the full text of the First Amendment and takes up almost the entirety of the door — far larger than the size of the two message boards the [current policy](#) restricts signage to.

In an interview with The Cavalier Daily, Camp said her main goal in posting the sign is to have the policy changed. The restrictions to Lawn room door signage were implemented this academic year following controversy over Lawn room signs displayed last [fall](#) and [spring](#) that critiqued the University's history of enslavement and accessibility.

“[The University said] ‘Okay, we don’t like what Lawnies are putting on their doors, so we’re going to essentially keep them from putting large signs on their doors,’”Camp said. “And I realized that that is something I couldn’t abide.”

Camp put the sign up early Friday morning, 234 years after the signing of the Constitution. Camp said that before posting the sign, she sent an email to the Office of the Dean of Students letting them know that she would be adding the display to her door and acknowledging that this would break the Lawn resident policy.

Camp said Interim Dean of Students Julie Caruccio responded and thanked Camp for her “reasoned heads up” and that Housing and Residence Life would be following up.

HRL sent an email to Lawn residents Tuesday saying that many rooms were not “in compliance” with the policy and that facilities management staff would be removing any non-compliant items at noon Wednesday if residents did not take them down.

As Camp did not take down her sign, staff members arrived to remove the sign from her door Wednesday afternoon as Camp filmed them.

[Tweet embedded:

[https://twitter.com/emmma\\_camp\\_/status/1440784659495874562?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1440784659495874562%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Esl\\_c10&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cavalierdaily.com%2Farticle%2F2021%2F09%2Fu-va-removes-lawn-resident-signs-posted-in-protest-of-new-hrl-signage-policy](https://twitter.com/emmma_camp_/status/1440784659495874562?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1440784659495874562%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Esl_c10&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cavalierdaily.com%2Farticle%2F2021%2F09%2Fu-va-removes-lawn-resident-signs-posted-in-protest-of-new-hrl-signage-policy)]

“That’s bulls—t,” one passerby says in the video as a staff member folds the sign in half.

HRL also removed other residents’ items, including 8.5 by 11 inch fliers that did not fit within the constraints of the message boards. One such flier was removed from the Lawn room door of Abel Liu, fourth-year College student and president of Student Council.

“The bottom line is that, in my experience, we are not seeing content-neutral guidelines or enforcement,” Liu said. “These guidelines are a reaction to Black and Brown students utilizing free speech in a unique space to highlight the institution’s violent past. The University has not been consistent in requiring compliance with its own Lawn room policies.”

Another Lawn resident was forced to trim his poster — which advocated for reproductive rights — down by one inch so that it would fit on the board.

[Tweet embedded:

[https://twitter.com/noah\\_strike/status/1440754748844437506?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1440754748844437506%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Esl\\_c10&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cavalierdaily.com%2Farticle%2F2021%2F09%2Fu-v-a-removes-lawn-resident-signs-posted-in-protest-of-new-hrl-signage-policy](https://twitter.com/noah_strike/status/1440754748844437506?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1440754748844437506%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Esl_c10&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cavalierdaily.com%2Farticle%2F2021%2F09%2Fu-v-a-removes-lawn-resident-signs-posted-in-protest-of-new-hrl-signage-policy)]

“Pretty much every single one of the pin boards [HRL] gave us is smaller than an 8.5 by 11 sheet of paper, so it’s nearly impossible to post anything without it going over the edge of the board,” Camp said.

While Camp is the first Lawn resident to protest with a larger sign, she is not the first to critique the new policy. Current and former Lawn residents previously [called the restrictions](#) “very hypocritical” and said they served “no good purpose.”

“I love U.Va., I’m extremely grateful for the opportunities I’ve had in my time here, but I think a bad call was made in regards to restrictions on Lawn signage,” Camp said.

Camp said she finds it “cowardly” that the University — whose Board of Visitors [endorsed](#) an “unequivocal” [commitment](#) to free speech last June — has “failed to uphold those precedents” by removing and restricting signs.

“[My hope is that] we can get back to having this beautiful tradition that we used to have of Lawn rooms just covered in posters and pride flags and fliers and messages,” Camp said. “It was this really wonderful beautiful thing that has died out because of this new policy.”

The University currently has a green-light rating from the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#), a nonpartisan foundation which works to “defend and sustain the rights of students and faculty at America’s colleges.” Green-light institutions are those whose “policies nominally protect free speech,” according to the FIRE.

The University is currently rated 22 on FIRE’s [College Free Speech Rankings](#) list. This is a drop from 2020, when it placed [sixth](#).

“There’s very much this idea that if speech upsets you, that means the speech shouldn’t be allowed to exist,” Camp said. “If we have these rights but not a culture of free speech, that’s not great because people have rights they don’t use.”

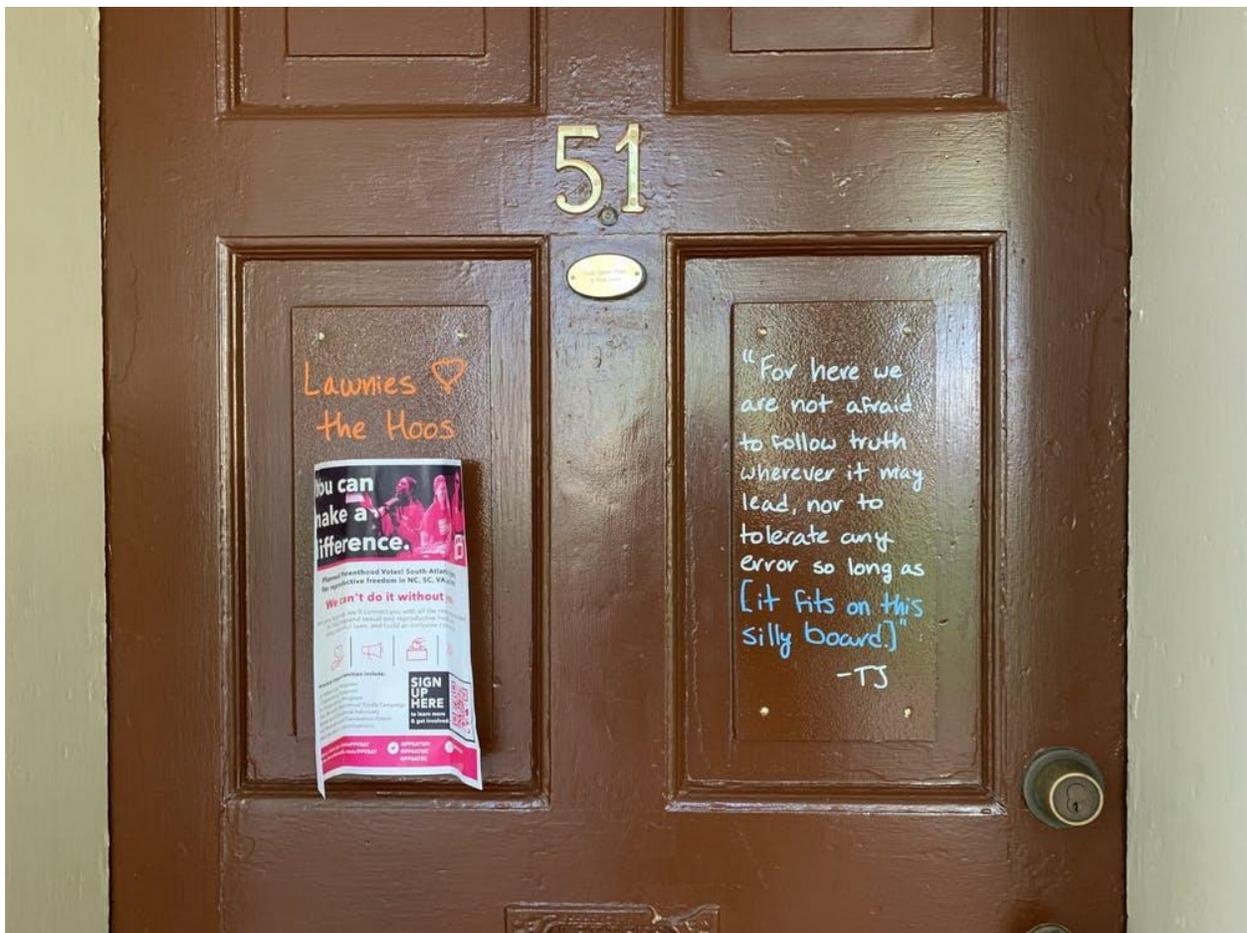
Camp hopes her actions will inspire other Lawn residents to fight back against the policies.

“I hope I inspire other people to put up signs,” Camp said. “Freedom of speech is the hill I’ve decided to fight and die on.”

# U.Va. updates message board policy for Lawn residents

The new policy allows Lawn residents to post messages of up to 11"x17" without restriction

By Amanda Pallas and Julianne Saunders  
December 23, 2021



The initial policy gave each room two boards for signage.  
Photo by Simran Arora | The Cavalier Daily

Lawn residents are now permitted to post signs of up to 11 inches by 17 inches on their doors, a change from the [contentious policy](#) that went into effect this fall that restricted posters to those that fit within message boards provided by Housing and Residence Life.

Robyn Hadley, vice president and chief student affairs officer, said in an email statement to Lawn and Range residents Friday that the message boards on Lawn doors were not uniformly sized — as such, some were able to fit posters that others were not.

“Thanks to the input of so many of you and several productive conversations between residents, our student affairs team, the President’s Office, and members of the Board of Visitors, we’ve agreed upon a revised policy that we hope will achieve the intended spirit of the original addendum with added clarity for all of us,” Hadley said.

Per the new policy, individual postings may be no larger than 11 inches by 17 inches and all postings must be affixed only to the two provided message boards. To prevent the confusion caused by the non-uniform size, student postings can extend beyond the boundaries of the message boards, provided that they remain within the specified size.

Still, signs can only be affixed to the boards and must not extend below the top of each room’s mail slot or above the room number. The updated policy is effective Jan. 1.

These changes in signage regulations follow controversy last year over Lawn room signs displayed last [fall](#) and [spring](#) that critiqued the University’s history of enslavement and accessibility. Many Lawn residents [criticized](#) the policy as an attempt to silence students and censor free speech, particularly in the context of the University’s [recently-approved](#) public [statement](#) on free expression and free inquiry.

Earlier this year, Emma Camp, fourth-year College student and Lawn resident, [protested](#) the restrictions by posting a full-length poster containing the text of the First Amendment on her Lawn room door until Housing and Residence Life arrived to take it down. Camp said she is mostly happy with the updated policy given that it takes into consideration the proposal she made.

“I’m quite happy with the new policy,” Camp said. “I wrote the first draft of it myself, so to see a policy proposal I drafted be enacted mostly unchanged is wonderful.”

Not all Lawn residents are happy with the new changes, however. Alex Moreno, fourth-year College student and Lawn resident, said he thinks there is still some concern with the updated rules for the message boards.

“While this version allows us more square footage to use on our door, I think that the new policy has the same issues as the old iteration regarding the fact that ultimately they are

restricting the door space in what feels like a more or less arbitrary manner,” Moreno said. “I recognize that the University has an interest in regulating the doors, but I don’t agree with U.Va.’s policy for the same reasons as the last version – it is a reactionary policy and doesn’t seem to really have much benefit for the academical village.”

Camp said that even though the restrictions were not completely removed, she thinks the new policy is ultimately a step in the right direction.

“Obviously, I would have ideally liked to see the rules removed entirely,” Camp said. “However, I think a compromise is still productive in this case, and I’m thankful that administration was willing to work with me on this.”