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**Center for Individual Rights Sues University of Connecticut  
Over School's Discriminatory Scholarship Award Policies**

***Suit Maintains Minority Student Denied Access to Merit Scholarship***

**Storrs, CT, June 3, 2014**--The Center for Individual Rights (CIR) today filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut on behalf of Pamela Swanigan, a graduate student in English at the University of Connecticut.

The suit alleges that Swanigan was not allowed to compete for a highly prestigious, merit-based scholarship despite being the top applicant the year she applied to UConn. Although the school told Swanigan she had received a merit-based scholarship, in fact and without her knowledge, it had swapped her award for one in a less prestigious and largely segregated scholarship program intended to increase "diversity."

The suit alleges that Swanigan was routed into the less prestigious award solely because of her race -- she is both African American and white. Not only was she deprived of the opportunity to compete for an academic award that would have benefited her career, the diversity scholarship did not provide funds for off-campus dissertation work, an option that Swanigan wanted and thought she was getting. As a result of UConn's deception, Swanigan lost the scholarship and is now working multiple jobs to finish her degree.

Pamela Swanigan applied for admission to the University's doctoral program in English in the fall of 2008. The Director of Graduate Studies in the English Department later wrote to Swanigan that she was "a stronger candidate that year than anyone," and that he and others were thinking at the time that they "were quite likely to lose [her] to some place like Yale."

In an acceptance letter to Swanigan, the Director of Graduate Studies offered her a merit-based scholarship called the "Vice Provost's Award for Excellence," which, he wrote, was a "highly significant honor" that featured an "annual reception held for recipients." The Director added that the "honors and accomplishments [of the recipients would] be publicized statewide when appropriate."

Swanigan was pleased and excited by this recognition of her academic excellence, and decided to enroll in the program. However, the checks Swanigan received each semester did not come from the Vice Provost's award. It turned out that no such program as the "Vice Provost's Award for Excellence" existed at the time she applied.

Two years after enrolling, and still believing she was receiving the "Vice Provost's Award for Excellence," Swanigan looked into the possibility of finishing her degree outside Connecticut. She sought to confirm her understanding that she could continue to receive the "Vice Provost's Award for Excellence" while working off-campus. She discovered for the first time that she had been receiving the "Multicultural Scholars Program" ("MSP") award all along and that, unlike what she had been told about the non-existent "Vice Provost's Award for Excellence," it did not provide funding for non-resident students.

"UConn decided not to allow Pamela to compete for a prestigious academic award in order to bestow a different award that recognized her for her race, not her academic achievements. Though the goal of diversity may be important, the University may not treat students differently on account of race," said Terence Pell, President of the Center for Individual Rights.

Pell continued, "This is about more than one applicant's experience at UConn. Many top universities offer diversity scholarships which are awarded on the basis of race. While the Supreme Court has said that race may be a plus factor in admissions decisions, it has never said race can be the basis for scholarship awards once an applicant has been admitted. A scholarship awarded on the basis of race inevitably stigmatizes talented minority applicants, who come to be recognized for their race rather than their considerable academic achievements."

As it turned out, the University did offer a merit-based award at the time she applied called the "Outstanding Scholars Program" ("OSP"). But because officials decided to nominate her for the MSP award, her nomination for the OSP was withdrawn -- even though she was the strongest candidate that year. Other non-minority students in her program were nominated for and received the OSP. Swanigan decided to attend the University based on the University's offer that she would receive a merit-based award and believes that the honor of having received a prestigious scholarship like the OSP would have benefitted her greatly in her later career.

Pamela Swanigan commented, "My goal is to ensure that students are treated as individuals regardless of race and regardless of other efforts to promote racial diversity. I wanted -- and still want -- to compete on the basis of my academic abilities just like any other student."

The suit asks for a ruling prohibiting the University from discriminatorily nominating students for its diversity and other scholarship awards, as well as damages in an amount to be proven at trial.

About The Center for Individual Rights:

The Center for Individual Rights is a non-profit public interest firm that specializes in civil rights, free speech, and other cases affecting individual rights. For more information, contact Terry Pell at 202-833-8400 x 113, or visit CIR's web site at <http://www.cir-usa.org>. Center for Individual Rights 1233 20th St., N.W., Suite 300 Washington, DC 20036

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