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# Family News

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*A Web site of Focus on the Family*

April 25, 2003

## University Speech Codes Under Fire

*By Steve Jordahl, correspondent*

*Lawsuit says restrictions amount to censorship.*

Restrictions on free speech at Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania are under fire. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) has filed a lawsuit against the school to remove what it calls a "speech code."

In the university's code of conduct, students are warned against "unconscious attitudes" that might surface in their speech. Still, Shippensburg's spokesman Pete Gigliotti vehemently denies that they have a speech code.

"This university has and always will vigorously defend the right to free speech," Gigliotti said. "We feel free speech is an important aspect of education and we encourage our students to become involved."

But even free speech needs some limits or restrictions, he admits.

"While they have a right to free speech, they also have a responsibility to exercise it in an appropriate manner," Gigliotti said.

FIRE lawyer Greg Lukianoff, however, said these restrictions tend to affect some groups more than others.

"You could potentially punish any speech that you disagree with, under that standard," Lukianoff said. "Words that, if they were used by some groups, (would) suddenly become crimes; whereas they'd be considered completely acceptable if used by others," Lukianoff said.

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As the debate about abortion and homosexual special privileges escalates on American campuses, Lukianoff says it has become especially important that minority opinion speech is protected.

"Effective free speech, important free speech, always provokes," Lukianoff said. "FIRE is preparing similar test cases across the country. Unfortunately maybe as many as two-thirds, if not more, colleges in the country have speech codes. That's a scandal."

The FIRE suit at Shippensburg seeks to have the speech code struck and two anonymous plaintiffs awarded unspecified damages. One suit is planned in each of the federal court districts.

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