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University Finds Nothing Corny About 'Offensive' Editorial Cartoon

Students' Rights Group Hopes to Deliver Kernel of Truth re: First Amendment

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - [Southwest Missouri State University](#) is once again being accused of stifling free speech on campus. The controversy involves a cartoon meant to poke fun at a common Thanksgiving tradition.

The faculty advisor and student editor of *The Standard*, the campus newspaper at Southwest Missouri State, are being investigated by the school and threatened with punishment for publishing an editorial cartoon that an American Indian group found "offensive" and a "form of harassment." The cartoon, printed on November 21, 2003, and labeled "The 2nd Thanksgiving," depicts two Indians meeting a pilgrim woman with a gift of canned corn. The pilgrim responds: "Gladys, the Indians are here and it looks like they brought corn ... again." ([Click here to see the cartoon](#))

Greg Lukianoff with the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) has sent three letters to school officials challenging their actions, which include "mediation" sessions with the advisor and editor to discuss the issue. He says such an innocuous cartoon does not warrant secret investigations and hearings.

"We're hoping that Southwestern Missouri State University will back off, because truly, if this simple cartoon represents the outer parameter of allowable free speech at Southwestern Missouri State University, then no free speech is safe," Lukianoff says.

The FIRE spokesman says the university needs to realize the First Amendment not only exists to protect non-controversial speech, but also speech that some may find controversial or "offensive." He supposes the school may argue that it is not punishing free speech, but only launching an investigation into a cartoon.

"Now imagine a society where anytime an author published a book it would have to go through hearings to decide whether it was allowable or not, no matter how clearly protected it was," Lukianoff says. "Obviously nobody would bother to write anything. So Southwestern Missouri State University definitely needs a lesson in what the First Amendment means."

Ironically, the cartoonist is an American Indian student who says he was merely "trying to reflect a common Thanksgiving tradition of a host griping about what their guest has brought to the dinner."

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