

Plan a cheap weekend love affair!



Editorials

[home](#) [accent](#) [business](#) [classifieds](#) [editorials](#) [happenings](#) [headlines](#) [horoscopes](#) [local](#) [national](#) [obituaries](#) [regional](#) [state](#) [sports](#) [world](#) [talkbackarchive](#) [searchstaff](#) [merchandise](#) [weather](#) [subscribe](#)

[Submit or Reply to an Editorial Online!](#)

Stifling speech

Monday, April 28, 2003

One would have thought universities learned the error of their ways after catching flak for imposing campus speech codes in the '90s. Evidently the penchant among university administrators for stifling speech is itself hard to stifle.

A nonprofit organization, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), has filed suit challenging a speech code at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania. The suit is a forerunner of a foundation campaign to take legal action against campus speech codes in each of the 12 federal appellate court jurisdictions, thus blanketing the nation.

A FIRE spokesman said the organization aims "to make it clear that codes like Shippensburg's are unconstitutional barriers to the free flow of ideas" and called the speech codes a "moral, educational and legal scandal" in higher education.

The university said it "strongly and vigorously defends the right of free speech. As an institution of higher education we encourage and promote free speech among and between individuals and organizations." The code's provisions, however, suggest otherwise.

The code says students have the right to be free from harassment, intimidation, physical harm or emotional abuse, while outlawing speech that would "provoke, harass, demean, intimidate or harm" others. Also on the banned list is conduct that "annoys, threatens, or alarms a person or a group." Would this make it against the rules to chew gum, an activity some find annoying? Would a student's mention of God be regarded as harassing or provoking a disbeliever?

Further listed as offending speech or conduct are sexual harassment, innuendo, comments, insults, propositions, jokes about sex or gender-specific traits, and "suggestive or insulting sounds" such as whistling.

University officials might consider sending the campus code to television network executives to be applied to talk shows and sitcoms. The kind of speech students are exposed to on TV hardly sets an example for what is acceptable in polite society.

The campus code is patently too broad in its attempt to spare from harm the most fragile of student sensitivities. It is so confining that the student plaintiffs in the lawsuit are identified as Jane and John Doe. Said the FIRE spokesman, "It tells you a lot about the climate on campus when students are so fearful about saying what they think."

Subscribe to the
Republican-American
It's EASY! [Click here.](#)