

# *Chattanooga Times*

## Speech codes on campus

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Free speech is always at risk in wartime, and now it is in danger from both left and right. Look at the local battles over the American flag. For every supporter of the war effort who wants to compel a flag display, there is a dissenter itching to forbid it as jingoistic or insensitive to foreigners.

Three firefighters in Miami refused to fly the flag from their truck on the grounds that America has not upheld its basic principles in foreign policy. They were suspended. The obvious irony is that America doesn't uphold its basic principles by forcing people into patriotic displays. In Melbourne, Fla., school officials ordered a bus driver to remove a 6-inch American flag he had taped to his side-view mirror. In this case, and many others around the country, officials were claiming that the flag display was a safety hazard. What they mean is that controversy of any kind can be hazardous to weak-kneed authorities. In a Cleveland suburb, a gung-ho high school student was suspended for 10 days for putting posters of a flag, an eagle and three bombing scenes on his locker. It took a court order to get him back in school. At the opposite end of the spectrum, a Colorado student was forced to remove an upside-down American flag sewn on the seat of her jeans along with an obscene insult to "Americanism." Schools have a right to ban obscenity, but waving or burning the flag, or placing it on one's rump, all come under the heading of free speech. Will someone tell the schools?

At San Diego State University, Zewdalem Kebede, a native of Ethiopia, scolded four Saudi students he said were speaking gleefully in Arabic about the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. He said they expressed regret that the bombers had failed to hit "the big house," presumably the White House. Kebede's tongue-lashing hurt the feelings of the Saudis. Since hurt feelings are a trump card on the modern campus, San Diego State put Kebede on notice that he may be expelled or suspended if he offends any other students.

At the University of California, Berkeley, leftists are still trying to punish the Daily Californian for its cartoon showing the World Trade Center bombers in hell. In retaliation, a bill in the student senate sought to raise the newspaper's rent unless the staff did penance by undergoing "diversity training." One co-author of the bill offered a classic in campus-speak: The cartoon "perpetuated the kind of ignorance that would lead to harassment." The other co-author said the cartoon "contributes to the wrong environment." Yes, dissent might send the university into a terrible tailspin.

**At the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, Mike Adams, a pro-war professor, is in trouble for answering a provocative e-mail from an anti-war student. Claiming that Adams' heated response created a hostile environment, the student demanded an investigation. Campus police declined to press charges, but numerous students were questioned and the university searched through Adams' e-mail looking for evidence.**

**A UCLA librarian was suspended without pay for sending an anti-Israel e-mail to a co-worker. In a celebrated case, history professor Richard Berthold of the University of New Mexico agreed to leave campus for a week because of safety concerns after he said in class, "Anyone who can blow up the Pentagon has my vote." (He later apologized, saying, "I was a jerk.")**

**The university didn't punish him, but it did usher him off campus for a while instead of defending his right to stay and offering physical protection.**

**A long list of current and horrible free-speech cases on campus is available on the Web site of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which scrupulously defends the rights of all comers.**

**People on the left are now starting to get caught in the anti-free-speech policies set up in the last 20 years to silence dissent. These are the speech codes and anti-bias and anti-harassment policies based on the idea that hurting anyone's feelings is a form of assault. The policies were applied selectively, almost always against conservatives and Christian groups.**

**Now college administrators, responding to a tidal wave of patriotism, are starting to turn these policies against the left. Having no particular principles, the officials blow with the wind. So it is dawning on the authors of the anti-free-speech policies that they now have reason to worry. Did they think they would always be in charge of the repressive machinery they set up?**