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GU Paper Accused of Censorship

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 Washington Post Staff Writer
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A Georgetown University student has appealed a decision by the school's student-run newspaper to terminate his biweekly column after he submitted a piece lambasting a campus performance of the feminist play "The Vagina Monologues."

Robert Swope, a junior who started writing columns for the Hoya in the fall, said he is a victim of censorship. He has appealed his firing to the school's Media Board, which is made up of Georgetown faculty members, administrators and students.

David Wong, who was the newspaper's student editor when Swope wrote the controversial column in late March, denied Swope's accusations. Wong said he was willing to run the piece but wanted to make some changes, such as taking out some graphic language from the play that Swope had included in the column. Wong said that Swope balked at the changes and that his column was terminated because he was difficult to work with. The piece was never published.

Swope's cause has been taken up by various free-speech activists, who say it is the latest in a series of incidents across the country in which students or faculty members have been sanctioned or threatened because of comments they made in their college's newspaper.

"Censorship is more than alive and well on campuses," said Harvey Silverglate, a Boston lawyer and co-founder of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, which monitors such incidents. "It is rampant. . . . The Georgetown case is just one more example of the things that are going on."

Swope also has the backing of some conservative Catholic organizations, including the national Cardinal Newman Society for the Preservation of Catholic Higher Education, and prominent alumni, including William Peter Blatty, author of "The Exorcist," who wrote a letter to the Hoya's editors that was not published. "With all that the demon says and does in my novel, never until I read of the . . . suppression of Robert Swope's article, have I truly appreciated the meaning of the word obscenity," Blatty's letter said.

The Hoya's archives show that Swope had written other provocative columns. Last

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semester, he wrote a column calling on Georgetown's president, the Rev. Leo J. O'Donovan, to resign and accusing him of failing to uphold the school's mission as a Catholic university.

Swope also wrote a column attacking an earlier performance on campus of "The Vagina Monologues," sponsored by the school's Women's Studies Department. He said last year's production of the play "exposes the women's center for what it really is: an indoctrination camp for lesbians and feminists."

This semester, he wrote a Feb. 11 column calling women's studies programs "the most intellectually bankrupt academic fraud ever to hit the American academy." Associate Dean Anne D. Sullivan responded in the next edition of the Hoya, defending the program.

Swope's second column on "The Vagina Monologues" attacked the university for permitting another production of the play, which this time was not sponsored by the Women's Studies Department. According to Swope, his editors informed him that they would not run the column because of its content, and his column was terminated when he objected.

Wong, who is now head of the Hoya's board of directors and a contributing writer, said Swope was fired not because of his views but because of his failure to comply with the newspaper's rules. Wong said Swope failed to keep his editor informed about column topics, routinely turned in work that was nearly twice as long as requested, and balked at being edited. Wong said the decision to terminate the column was his own and did not involve any Georgetown administrators.

"He said that we disagreed with his views and that's why we decided to cut his column. . . . That's not how we operate," Wong said.

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