

FIRE Lawsuit Charges Alabama School With Stifling Free Speech

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - Troy University in Alabama is being sued over policies that allegedly stifle free speech on campus. The lawsuit being coordinated by the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) targets a speech code at the university -- a policy banning age- or religion-related jokes, "derogatory" comments about gender, gossip, and "insulting" or "suggestive" remarks.

The lawsuit against Troy University is the fifth in FIRE's campaign to overturn restrictive university speech codes in every federal circuit in the U.S. The group's legal director, Greg Lukianoff, believes the school's speech code is wildly "unconstitutional" as well as unduly restrictive in an academic environment.

"Politeness is a virtue but, fortunately, it's not the law," Lukianoff says. "Basically, under Troy University's speech code anything that someone could conceivably argue is insulting, hurt their feelings, or might have arguably 'demeaned' them, they can bring that student up on charges. And if free speech means nothing else, it means you have the right to say things that are provocative."

But instead of protecting that right, the advocacy group spokesman contends, the policies at Troy stifle constitutionally protected expression. "Universities are supposed to be centers of debate, candor, and discussion," he says. "The Supreme Court, half a century ago, said essentially that any straitjacket you put on debate and discourse in our nation's universities will have devastating impact on the society at large."

FIRE has succeeded in overturning speech codes at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, Texas Tech University, The State University of New York at Brockport, and Citrus College in California. The group's lawsuit against Troy seeks to overturn its speech code and also argues that the school unlawfully removed some photos from a student's art exhibit that featured nude models.

Although Troy's administration would not directly address allegations about its speech code, university spokesman Tom Davis said the student art photos in question were not consistent with the school's "community standards."

Jim Brown, a regular contributor to *AgapePress*, is a reporter for [American Family Radio News](#), which can be heard online.

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