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No real controversy in UMass event

The Boston Globe

April 13, 2009

PEOPLE FAMILIAR with the University of Massachusetts at Amherst know that it has a long tradition of fostering discourse and the open exchange of ideas, and that groups from the left, right, and in between vigorously exercise their free speech with great frequency.

Given this history, it was perplexing to read the April 9 op-ed by Robert Shibley of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ("Why no one should be silenced on campus"). His interpretation of events misses the mark.

UMass-Amherst did not place a surcharge on the Republican Club because we anticipated protesters for a speech delivered by columnist Don Feder. Rather, the police increased the charge because the number of anticipated attendees changed, and because the Republican Club representative declined to move the event to a venue more suited to the presentation. While Feder was heckled, the police handled the situation in the room without difficulty, which included removing one person. Feder chose to discontinue his speech.

The figure in dispute is less than \$500. The university does not wish to perpetuate the perception of a controversy. So, to emphasize our commitment to free and open debate, the university has decided to refund the difference between a fee for a 70-person event and a fee for a 150-person event.

Ed Blaguszewski
Executive director of news and media relations
University of Massachusetts at Amherst ■

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