

## ***Flash! Republicans urge free speech on college campuses***

by Nat Hentoff, Aspen Daily News Columnist  
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With the elections imminent and rivalries fiercely cresting, I was surprised and very pleased to find this on page 12 of the Republican Party's national platform:

"We oppose governmental censorship of speech through the so-called Fairness Doctrine or by government enforcement of speech codes, free speech zones or other forms of 'political correctness' on campus."

This clarion call to our most fundamental individual constitutional freedom is a much-needed recognition by the GOP that many colleges and universities have long been dictating what views can and cannot be expressed on campus by individual students and professors. So far this recognition has been ignored by the Democratic Party platform and has hardly been picked up during other campaigns anywhere else.

I've often reported on this degradation of "higher learning" by officially imposed "political correctness" — including in my book, "Free Speech for Me — But Not for Thee" (HarperCollins, 1992). But for years, the main, national free-speech force exposing this betrayal of students' and professors' First Amendment rights has been the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), based in Philadelphia. Its mission:

"To defend and sustain individual rights at America's colleges and universities ... freedom of speech, legal equality, due process, religious liberty ... the essential

qualities of individual liberty and dignity.”

FIRE’s involvement in multitudes of these cases (most of them bypassed by the American Civil Liberties Union) comes with its attendant direct communication with college officials, followed by widespread state and national publicity. There are resultant frequent victories for students’ and professors’ free expression across the entire spectrum of politics, religion and non-religion.

But as illustrated in his new book, “Unlearning Liberty” (Encounter Books, 2012), FIRE President Greg Lukianoff shows that so much more remains to be done: “Sixty-five percent of colleges maintain speech codes that would be ruled flatly unconstitutional if challenged under the First Amendment.”

Thankfully, Lukianoff and FIRE have provided college students on these embattled campuses an expert education not otherwise available to them, with books like the “Guide to Free Speech on Campus.” This lucid postgraduate course in American history and law would benefit and absorb all of us. It’s full of real-life, real-time examples that illustrate free-speech warrior Justice William Brennan’s truth: “If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.”

This includes college officials.

I have long been on FIRE’s Board of Advisors. However, Lukianoff and the rest of the staff are so alertly knowledgeable — actually doubling as investigative reporters — that my function is not to advise but to report on many of FIRE’s free-speech battles, as I have done.

For example, the University of Delaware instituted a mandatory re-education program in 2007 requiring its roughly 7,000 students in residence halls to strictly

adhere to specific university-approved positions on race, sexuality, politics and moral philosophy. They were required to have face-to-face meetings with their resident assistants (RAs) to be questioned on these views and, when ordered, change them.

Having directly charged university officials on their clear assault on those students' freedom of conscience and then making this forced "re-education" a national story, FIRE succeeded in ending the program. There are still attempts by the University of Delaware to get it going again, but FIRE remains acutely vigilant.

A case earlier this year involved the University of Cincinnati's "free speech zone" — a specially supervised place on campus where free-speech activities are permitted. (A number of other colleges and universities have instituted such a zone.)

On Feb. 22, 2012, a student group, Young Americans for Liberty, filed a lawsuit after being denied permission by the University of Cincinnati to talk to students and gather signatures across campus in support of a statewide "right to work" ballot proposal ("University of Cincinnati Sued Over Free Speech Zone," Feb. 23, [thefire.org](http://thefire.org)).

Young Americans for Liberty was sharply told by the university that if any of its members were identified as "walk(ing) around campus" collecting these signatures, campus security would spring into action.

Keep in mind that this carefully patrolled "free speech zone" existed on just 0.1 percent of the university's 137-acre West Campus.

And dig this: According to FIRE, "University policy further required that all expressive activity in the free speech zone be registered with the university a full 10 working days in advance, threatening that '(a)nyone violating this policy may

be charged with trespassing.”

Would George Washington recognize this campus as being in America?

Young Americans for Liberty was being represented in its federal lawsuit by FIRE and Ohio's 1851 Center for Constitutional Law. As FIRE President Lukianoff said: “The University of Cincinnati is a public, taxpayer-supported institution that brazenly refuses to respect the First Amendment rights of its students ...

“FIRE has warned UC in the past, and now the university must answer for its disregard for free speech in federal court.”

It did so just last month. On Aug. 22, “United States District Judge Timothy S. Black issued a permanent injunction against UC’s unconstitutional system of speech restriction” (“Federal Court Delivers Final Blow to U. of Cincinnati ‘Free Speech Zone,’” [thefire.org](http://thefire.org)).

Long live James Madison!

While such quick victories have been the exception, FIRE never gives up, as I shall continue demonstrating next week.

Meanwhile, I have an important question for Mitt Romney: If you, sir, become our president, will you support the Republican Party’s forthright opposition to “government enforcement of speech codes, free speech zones or other forms of ‘political correctness’ on campus” by encouraging and supporting student resistance against administrations shutting down free speech? And what does his co-star Paul Ryan have to say about this?

That remains to be seen ...