



FIRE Applauds University of Nevada-Reno's Dropping of 'Speech Zones'

By Jim Brown
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(AgapePress) - The University of Nevada at Reno (UNR) has eliminated so-called "speech zones" that limited student expression on campus. The university's previous policy had designated only four small or remote areas on its grounds as "public forum" spaces while explicitly deeming the rest of the campus a non-public forum.

The new policy adopted by the university, however, allows students to use the entire campus -- except for the interior of buildings -- to demonstrate, protest, or pass out flyers and newspapers. Student activists working with the American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada and the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education](#) (FIRE) had protested the old policy that restricted free speech to only those four areas of the UNR campus specified as free-speech zones.

In 2004, FIRE president Greg Lukianoff notes, a federal judge barred Texas Tech from limiting free speech to only a 20-foot wide gazebo on that campus. "The open areas of public campuses are assumed to be public forums," Lukianoff says. "The court decision that came out of the Texas Tech litigation that FIRE coordinated with the [Alliance Defense Fund](#) resulted in a decision called *Roberts v. Haragan*, where that's essentially what the court said."

Attorneys with the Alliance Defense Fund, along with local counsel Ronnie Agnew, filed the lawsuit known as *Jason W. Roberts v. Donald R. Haragan, et al.*, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Lubbock Division, on behalf of Roberts, a Texas Tech student. The court ruled in Roberts' favor, striking down Texas Tech's speech code regulation requiring students to obtain permission to express themselves or distribute literature on the grounds of the campus outside of designated "free-speech zones." The court also issued a "cease and desist" order, forbidding Texas Tech officials from enforcing the unconstitutional policies.

Many universities have taken a "lazy, illiberal" approach to dealing with free-speech problems, Lukianoff observes. "You don't need to have a free-speech zone to prevent people from disrupting the material functions of the university," he contends. "Universities have always had the power to stop students from disrupting students sleeping, students studying, et cetera."

FIRE's president says his group is "thrilled" that the University of Nevada at Reno has taken such decisive action to protect its students' free-speech rights. "This is truly a victory for liberty," he comments, "and we commend the students and administrators who made this happen." The First Amendment rights advocate notes that FIRE's work against so-called "free-speech zones" began [more than four years ago at West Virginia University](#), where a long campaign of public pressure from the advocacy group brought about the school's eventual abandonment of its policies restricting free expression to designated areas.

Lukianoff says he hopes other universities will realize, just as West Virginia University,

Texas Tech, and now the University of Nevada at Reno have acknowledged, that free speech should not be quarantined on campus. And, he adds, he and FIRE hope the hard work and success of the UNR student activists will inspire "students everywhere" to stand up for their rights.

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

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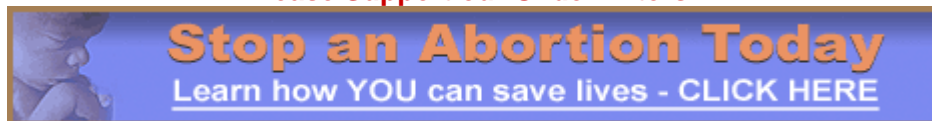
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