

Culture

Tufts case called hit to speech

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A campus magazine at Tufts University has been found guilty of "harassment" by a disciplinary board, a decision that could establish "a terrifying precedent," according to an academic-freedom group.

The Primary Source, a conservative monthly published by Tufts students, commemorated "Islamic Awareness Week" last month on the Medford, Mass., campus with a full-page "supplement" headlined "Islam -- Arabic Translation: Submission," that cited facts about Muslim history.

That unsigned article, along with a satirical "Christmas carol" in the magazine's December issue mocking the university's affirmative-action program, was cited as a violation of Tufts's "nondiscrimination policy."

"From now on, all material published in the Primary Source (whether characterized as satirical or otherwise) must be attributed to named author(s) or contributor(s)," the university's Committee on Student Life ruled, recommending "that student governance consider the behavior of student groups in future decisions concerning recognition and funding."

Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), said the magazine's article about Islam was "one-sided," but warned that the Tufts ruling endangers students' rights to free speech.

"The students were responding to what they thought was a one-sided and overly rosy depiction of Islam during Islamic Awareness Week," the FIRE official said. "But is it unprotected harassment? One certainly hopes not, or else 'harassment' just became a truly lethal threat to free speech -- an 'exception' that completely swallows the rule."

The panel's decision "appeared not even to raise the issue of whether or not the statements ... were true, but turned only on how they made people feel," Mr. Lukianoff said.

In a signed editorial, the magazine's editor in chief called for Tufts to honor "its moral obligations to protect freedom of speech."

"The Primary Source strongly believes that any limitation on controversial and even 'hurtful' speech will create a 'chilling effect' and lead this University down a dangerous road," Matthew Schuster wrote. "A university's primary goal should be fostering an intellectually thriving atmosphere that teaches students how to think, not what to think."

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