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Perspectives

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The cost of free speech



Seven Wisconsin students find that funding student groups they don't agree with infringes on their First Amendment rights. To take away these funds would be an even worse breach of the First Amendment



**Beata
Mostafavi**

In the heat of debate, people can become an impediment to their own cause. Such is the case in the recent hot topic in the courts regarding student fees. On Nov. 9, the U.S. Supreme Court plans to begin a debate on the issue of student fees, including the concern of whether students should have to help fund student groups they don't agree with. Seven students from the University of Wisconsin at Madison have sued the university for being mandated to fund groups that had social and political beliefs the students disagreed with.

The Wisconsin students' claim their First Amendment right is being infringed upon because they are being forced to fund groups they object to. But if student fees can't be used for the idea of free speech itself, then many more can't even practice the First Amendment because unpopular groups probably won't be around. The loss of those programs would be a much greater trample over people's

rights. Having gone to the courts four times to fight for its right to receive student funding, OSPIRG knows how such cuts can affect a student group. With last spring's student vote to defund Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group at the University, the organization's campaigns suffered greatly.

"There's a huge value in students making decisions as a community," said Merriah Fairchild, OSPIRG board chair. "It makes no difference if I support this group or that (group). Regardless, students as a community fund a variety of groups, and this advocates a free marketplace of ideas, which is part of campus."

If the Wisconsin students win their case, the final decision would apply here too. The University has incidental fees, approximately \$163 per student, per term, which go toward such things as the Athletic Department, Career Center and student groups. As long as money is going toward building a democratic and diverse campus where all students have the opportunity to join a well-intentioned group, universities have every right to use their budgets accordingly.

Without such fees, some of these groups could cease to exist. It's understandable if students argue against fund-

ing political groups. But some of the organizations the Wisconsin students are opposed to are ones nobody should be trying to cut down, such as their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Campus Center, the Campus Women's Center and the Madison AIDS Support Network.

In the Oct. 8 issue of the Emerald, EMU Director Dusty Miller expressed a viewpoint that all students should consider.

"I am a supporter of the marketplace of ideas and concepts, even if I am not a member or supporter of that group," he said.

Well said.

The irony presented here is that as much as the Wisconsin students believe they are working in the favor of free speech, the outcome will do just the opposite because free speech groups will decline.

"In the name of free speech, we will actually reduce the amount of free speech on (college) campuses," said Wisconsin Attorney General James Doyle in the October Southworth Project.

So, say I'm a student who just doesn't believe in athletics, or I believe that people who drink are asking for the consequence of driving under the influence. Hey, I don't want to pay for anything that serves them. Boom. Enough students like me, and there's

the termination of the Athletic Department and the Designated Driver Shuttle. If policies change at universities as a result of the Court ruling in the Wisconsin students' favor, this is where we're headed.

Today, it's the argument against funding groups we don't ideologically agree with; tomorrow, it will be that we don't want to pay for services we don't personally use because it also violates our justice system.

For any community to be successful, individuals have to give in for the common good. We pay for things we don't want to pay for all of the time. Anyone ever heard of taxes? Those would be the fees we sometimes involuntarily sacrifice to the hands of our government in order for it to establish the best human world possible.

Student groups funded by the fees these plaintiffs oppose are necessary to provide the best educational experience for every college student. Such fees should be constitutional because they advocate a forum for free speech. Those who join the battle against it are taking away exactly what they're fighting for.

Beata Mostafavi is a columnist for the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper. She can be reached via email at bmostafa@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

Letters to the editor

Amendment not misused

I was interested to see the Jewish Student Union's, and Co-Director Jennifer Hoenigsberg's, statements in Tuesday's cover story (ODE, Oct. 12), in particular the comment on "GAP's disrespect and misuse of the First Amendment." Regardless of whether the amendment was respected or not, or indeed whether it is possible to "dis" an amendment, the only way to misuse the Freedom of Speech is to not use it at all. The day I'll start protesting is the day that someone is not allowed to present their views, no matter what those views are.

Pete Martin
Undeclared

Disgusted with both sides

I was disgusted with the narrow-minded actions of both the pro and anti-abortion rights advocates Monday: The one side peddling clearly misleading rhetoric and the other rushing to save onlookers from the logical consequences of freedom of expression.

Pro-lifers would like us to think that all abortions destroy a formed human fetus as depicted in their late-term photos. The pro-choicers would pretend that late term abortions never take place. It is wholly possible to be horrified at the reality of late-term abortion while still supporting women's rights to first-trimester abortion.

But apparently pro-choicers believe the two are so analogous that even recognizing that late term abortions take place at all would threaten abortion rights for all time. In so acting, they implicitly support the pro-lifer's irrational view that these pictures represent all abortions. Why not just admit that late-term abortion is a horrible fact to be dealt with, while pointing out that it has no bearing whatsoever on whether women should have the rights to first-trimester abortion?

It seems as if both sides of the debate have a stake in forcing Americans to see the issue in black and white, as if we lack the moral acuity and intellectual wherewithal to decide for our-

selves where the line should be drawn. Give us some credit.

Robyn Carpenter
Political Science

Louder than words

I found it interesting that the stories about the Genocide Awareness Project protests and the free speech platform appeared together in today's Emerald (ODE, Oct. 12). The protesters who decided that students should be shielded from this form of expression seem anxious not to be seen as intolerant of the First Amendment rights of others. The fact that they covered these posters with bed sheets speaks rather more loudly to me that does their denials of intolerance.

The images are starkly ugly and brutal. The display's message, that abortion belongs to that set of hor-

rible, brutal things that we humans do to other humans, is disturbing, but deserves to be listened to. It confronts us with the possibility that we, too, are capable of committing morally equivalent acts.

I understand that these ideas and images make people uncomfortable — they should. They show us what real, living human beings have done to other human beings. They invite us to question beliefs and practices that we have come to accept as moral. If we find ourselves unwilling to allow these ideas and images to confront and disturb us, perhaps we are the champions of truth, freedom and tolerance that we imagine ourselves to be.

William Moore
Classified Staff