

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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Office of the President

70 WASHINGTON SQUARE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10012-1091
TELEPHONE: (212) 998-2345
FACSIMILE: (212) 995-4790

John Sexton
President

August 15, 2006

Greg Lukianoff, President
Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
601 Walnut Street, Suite 510
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

Dear Mr. Lukianoff:

Thank you for sharing your thoughts about the events of last spring. I apologize for responding tardily.

The University rejects your assertion of censorship. The key fact, which the public utterances by your group unremittingly choose to downplay or outright ignore, is that at no time did the University say that the event could not go forward with the display of the cartoons. Indeed, the reverse was true: despite entreaties from the Muslim community at NYU that the display of the cartoons be forbidden, I wrote them to say that because of NYU's commitment to the free exchange of ideas, the event sponsored by the Objectivist Club would go forward with the display of the cartoons.

Late on the day of the event – indeed, just an hour or two before the event was to start – the Objectivist Club indicated that it would prefer not to display the cartoons in order to be allowed to invite non-University guests to be part of the audience. This decision was made wholly and exclusively by the student sponsors. I encourage you to contact them and ask to see the email they sent late that afternoon to the administrators in Student Affairs, with whom they were dealing.

Because all institutions have a responsibility to ensure that events held on their properties can go forward without the threat of harm or significant disruption, because of the level of fractiousness that arose over this proposed event, and because of the violence that had attended the cartoons in other parts of the world, the University decided to limit attendance to an audience from among the mere 50-60,000 members of the University community; this same step has been taken in the past with other speakers and events. When the possibility of such a decision was first shared verbally with the student organizers in a meeting almost a week prior to the event, they did not oppose it and merely wished to obtain feedback from the group's student members.

Events held by student organizations are principally meant to serve the student community and the broader community at NYU. The definition of an open meeting at NYU is that it is open to *the NYU community*, not the broader community. Given the diversity of views within our large population of students, scholars, and administrators – we are the largest private university in the U.S.– NYU rejects the assertion that free speech was in any way abridged.

As to the issue of tickets: it is impossible to know, when someone picks up a ticket, whether he or she intends to attend an event. We do not query ticket buyers about their intentions, and I know of no institution that does. On the day of the event, the student organizers came to the Student Affairs staff to share their concerns that tickets were being picked up by members of the NYU community who intended not to use them, that they would not have an audience, and that they would like to invite their list of outside guests to ensure that they would have an audience. In response, those administrators told them that if there were sufficient space in the auditorium at the time of the start of the program, they would accommodate the club to ensure that its guests were admitted regardless of whether they had actual tickets. If the students had instead chosen to go forward with the event with the cartoons displayed, the Student Affairs staff would have made similar accommodations for members of the University community who wished to attend but did not have a ticket.

Although I believe your organization has consistently provided a tendentious and incorrect narrative in describing this NYU event, freedom of speech and the free exchange of ideas are such enormously important values that I fully understand and appreciate the passion you bring to this matter. Nonetheless, after full consideration, I disagree with and reject your assertions of censorship on the part of the University.

Sincerely,


John Sexton

Cc: Members of the NYU Board of Trustees