

InTouch: UNC Employee Forum News

Volume 8, Special Edition, August 2007

Censorship

The trouble with censorship is that you could be a victim of it and never know it. Many readers of the Employee Forum's *InTouch* newsletter, for instance, may be unaware that in its annual print edition that was distributed as a paid insert in the *University Gazette* on July 18, 2007, there was an article missing because the *Gazette* refused to print it. The Forum maintains that this was censorship; the *Gazette* maintains that it was just the exercise of their right to control the content of the *Gazette*.

The third article in our three-part series on collective bargaining, written by and based on the research of UNC-Chapel Hill sociology grad student Raj Ghoshal, was scheduled to appear in our four-page insert that is printed once each year under the Forum's masthead. In laying out this insert, the *Gazette* made a number of substantive edits to several of our articles and flatly refused to print Ghoshal's piece because, they said, they do not print opinion pieces and they do not speak to legislative issues in the *Gazette*. Ghoshal's article, they said, was an opinion piece and was also unsuitable because its subject is a matter of legislative concern.

Forum delegates have surveyed the *Gazette* archives and believe that neither of these rationales appears to be well supported by the historic evidence. They say that the rules cited also appear to have been selectively applied: Other articles in the same Forum insert offered the author's opinions and/or spoke to legislative issues, but they were not censored.

After the Forum had engaged in some serious negotiation efforts, the *Gazette* eventually agreed to withdraw their substantive edits and print most of our articles more or less as we had submitted them. But they remained adamant in their refusal to print Ghoshal's article. Despite the fact that Ghoshal revised the piece to make it even clearer that he was reporting on the ideas of his study subjects rather than writing in his own voice. Despite our suggestion that the *Gazette* print a disclaimer over the article or over the entire insert, so that readers would be very clear that the contents of the insert were our newsletter's contents, not the *Gazette*'s.

In subsequent communications, the *Gazette* said that they had refused to run the article because its subject matter was not in line with University priorities. In an August 8, 2007, letter to AAUP-Chapel Hill Chapter President Carl Ernst, the *Gazette* continued to maintain that the article was not a report on research but a commentary expressing the author's opinions. It stated that since it was a commentary on collective bargaining, publishing the piece "was inconsistent with the *Gazette*'s mission to help support the University's overall goals."

In that same letter, the *Gazette* further maintained that its actions were not censorship because the Forum is always free to publish the article in its regular online newsletter, if it wishes. In other words, the *Gazette* admitted that the *InTouch* newsletter has been and continues to be an independent publication that is not subject to the editorial restrictions of the *Gazette* and that can therefore publish whatever it thinks is necessary and proper.

Except on July 18, 2007, it would appear, when the *InTouch* came out as a paid insert under its own masthead in the *Gazette*.

The Forum feels that this kind of selective restriction on what the *InTouch* publishes is censorship—effectively a breach of the First Amendment rights of staff employees. It is also a violation of our readers' right to receive uncensored information.

Because Chancellor Moeser has gone on record numerous times in support of free speech at UNC-Chapel Hill (see the October 10, 2001, *Gazette* for one striking example), the Forum is considering a resolution asking him to direct the censored article to be published under the Forum's masthead as a special insert in a future edition of the *Gazette*. The resolution will also request that he re-affirm the First Amendment right of free speech for everyone at UNC—faculty, students *and staff*.

Readers who would like to express their opinions on this matter can send a letter or an email to the Chancellor and to the Employee Forum at the following addresses. If you write to the Chancellor, be sure to send a copy to the Forum!

Chancellor James Moeser
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Readers wanting to know more about Chancellor Moeser's previous public statements about free speech will find his comments in the October 10, 2001, *Gazette* informative ("Moeser Supports Free Expression," *University Gazette*, October 10, 2001, at <http://gazette.unc.edu/archives/01oct10/file.3.html>).

His previous statements supporting the University's ability to engage in discussions of contested subjects without resorting to speech codes or infringing upon First Amendment rights can be found in "State of the University: Moeser highlights goals and initiatives for UNC," *University Gazette*, September 21, 2005, at <http://gazette.unc.edu/archives/05sep21/file.1.html>.

For a detailed chronology of the events surrounding the publication of the *InTouch* insert, as well as some supporting documentation, see <http://forum.unc.edu/documents/UGchron.pdf>.

