

January 31, 2011

Rutgers not changing policy after Holocaust program controversy

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The university has no immediate plans to amend any of its policies, a Rutgers spokesman said, following a controversy caused when a pro-Palestinian group began charging an entry fee to a Holocaust remembrance lecture Saturday.

The Saturday lecture, called "Never Again for Anyone," was sponsored by American Muslims for Palestine, which leased Trayes Hall at the Douglass Campus Center and paid for the event.

University police were called to the center Saturday after a group of people said they were stopped from attending the lecture when American Muslims for Palestine began charging a fee to hear a Holocaust remembrance lecture.

"This was not a university event," Rutgers spokesman E.J. Miranda said. "The decision to impose the fee was made by the event organizer."

Initially, the event was sponsored by the pro-Palestinian student organization, Belief Awareness Knowledge and Activism, and advertised as free — but with a suggested donation — and open to the public.

According to Miranda, organizers originally suggested a donation of \$5 to \$20 to enter but then imposed a \$5 entry fee. Some of those who wished to attend tried to enter without paying or through unauthorized entrances, including fire doors, he said.

The only people denied entry were those who refused to pay the fee, Miranda said.

"Police assisted in facilitating access to the hall and crowd control," Miranda said. "Individuals who declined to pay the entrance fee, or who wished to protest the event, gathered inside the student center."

American Muslims for Palestine was asked in January by the university "to become the sponsoring organization" because of a university policy against allowing outside organizations to publicize a student-run event on its website, Miranda said. After agreeing to become a sponsor, the group then "finalized the arrangements for the event."

Kristin Szremski, director of media communications for the American Muslims for Palestine, said the group's "overall mission is dedicated to educating the American people about issues related to Palestine.

"You can uphold the honor and dignity of those who perished in the Holocaust by upholding human rights that are inherent to all," she said.

Jake Binstein, a Rutgers freshman and member of the Jewish student organization, Hillel, said, "They brought two kinds of speakers. One was a Holocaust survivor . . . the second set was talking about the plight of the Palestinians. By putting both together on the same stage at the same time, they're comparing Israelis to Nazi's."

Between 20 and 30 students from Hillel, wearing shirts that read "Don't politicize the Holocaust" under their jackets, had planned a walkout during the lecture — a silent protest that was quelled by the imposed fee, Binstein said.
