



THE

AFCON

SENTINEL



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A Quarterly of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska

March 14, 2014

AFCON OFFICERS

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President Elect

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Lora Leibrandt
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Linda Parker
AFCON Archivist

Tom Black
Newsletter Editor

Purpose:

To promote academic freedom, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT—David Moshman

Haven't I been here before? I seem to be the president of AFCON once again, having previously served in 1993 and 2005. So here's to my third term.

I take the place of Frank Edler, who will be a tough act to follow. Frank was already an active Board member when he agreed in fall 2011 to run for president and has remained an energetic and forceful advocate for academic freedom. In accord with our by-laws, he served throughout 2012 as president-elect, served throughout 2013 as president, and will serve until the end of 2014 as immediate past president.

Another tough act to follow will be Bob Haller, the only previous person to have served three terms as president of AFCON. Like me, Bob tried hard to limit himself to two terms. When he found himself nominated to a third, he announced that he would run on a platform of "No third term." He was elected anyway.

Recognizing the failure of Bob's subtle approach, I knew better than to depend on losing an election. Instead, when the nominating committee asked me in fall 2012 to run once again for president-elect, I flat-out refused to be nominated. A good strategy, you would think. But everyone else did the same.

Thus, when Frank became president in January 2013 we were left without a president-elect. Months later, in accord with our by-laws, Frank filled the vacancy by appointing me president-elect and the Board confirmed that appointment. So that's the story of how, despite my best efforts, I become president of AFCON once again.

Fortunately, I have plenty of help. In addition to me, the Board, which meets monthly, includes Peggy Adair, secretary and legislative liaison; Dwayne Ball, representing ACLU Nebraska; Tom Black, award-winning editor of *The Sentinel*, representing the Nebraska State Education Association; Nancy Comer, our new president-elect, representing the Nebraska State Reading Association; Frank Edler, immediate past president; Claudia Garcia, representing the UNO Faculty Senate; Bob Haller, representing the American Association of University Professors (Nebraska State Conference) and all things wise and wonderful; Laurie Thomas Lee, representing the UNL Faculty Senate; Lora Leibrandt, webmaster, representing the Nebraska School Librarians Association; Cathi McMurtry, treasurer-for-life since AFCON was founded in 1988; Linda Parker, archivist, representing the Nebraska Library Association; and Rod Wagner, representing the Nebraska Center for the Book (don't ask which one).

In addition to Frank, Bob, and me, six other Board members—Peggy, Dwayne, Nancy, Laurie, Linda, and Rod—are former presidents who just can't stop defending academic freedom. And one of these, Nancy Comer, apparently observing that refusing to run didn't do me any good, agreed last fall to run again for president-elect and, after serving this year in that position, will replace me as president in January 2015.

But meanwhile, I'll do my best to promote academic freedom in Nebraska. If you have any complaints, blame Frank, who made me what I am.

Upcoming Events

AFCON Board Meetings, April 12, May 10, June 14, 2014
Loren Eiseley Library, 1530 Superior, Lincoln, Nebraska; 10 AM

Summaries of AFCON Board of Directors' Meetings—Peggy Adair

January 11, 2014—

Present: Peggy Adair, secretary, Tom Black, Frank Edler, Bob Haller, Laurie Thomas Lee, Lora Leibrandt, Cathi McMurtry, David Moshman, Linda Parker, Rod Wagner.

MINUTES: Minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on November 9, 2013, were approved as presented upon a motion by Edler, second by Lee, and a voice vote. Adair will work on gathering the list of AFCON founding members for recognition on the AFCON website and in other communications as warranted.

TREASURER'S REPORT: McMurtry presented the year-end treasurer's report dated January 10, 2014, with a balance on hand of \$1,102.70 as of November 8, 2013. The treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Moshman reported all complaints related to the presidency should be filed with Edler.

LEGISLATIVE LIAISON: Adair reported a few possible AFCON-related bills have been introduced in the first three days of the legislative session. She will review these bills and also will review other bills as they are introduced and will report back to the Board.

SENTINEL: Black will email future issues of the *Sentinel* unless a person requests a paper copy. Articles for the next issue of the *Sentinel* are due February 24. The *Sentinel* will be published and sent out via email on March 14.

TREAT OF THE DAY: Fruitcake.

ELECTION RESULTS: Haller reported the 2014 slate of AFCON officers has been officially elected by unanimous consent.

WEBSITE: Parker reported an app called "hootsuite" is available to help manage multiple social sites. Parker will do more research on the app and report back to the board. Parker and Leibrandt will update the AFCON website and will work on developing a Facebook page.

OSHER LIFELING LEARNING INSTITUTE: Haller requested help in filling out the six sessions of his proposed OLLI class about banned books and related issues. Moshman will do a session on Israel; Edler offered to do a session on World War I censorship; Adair offered to do a session on Hazelwood. Other possible sessions discussed were journalism, the harms of censorship, global banned books, and anything Dwayne Ball wants to talk about.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH CONFERENCE: (Nov. 20-23, 2014; Washington, D.C.)

Edler reported ReLeah Lent has drafted a proposal for a workshop session that will include AFCON board members on a panel to discuss how to develop Academic Freedom organizations in the 50 states.

Edler proposed an additional workshop on starting a national dialog about the importance of critical thinking, as ReLeah Lent suggested. It was the consensus of the Board that the Academic Freedom workshop should take precedence. Parker suggested the national dialog might be a good session for "TED Talks" (Technology/Entertainment/Design). Their website is <http://www.ted.com/talks>.

Edler will continue to communicate with Lent as the NCTE process moves forward.

UNL N-WORD CONTROVERSY: Edler reported he sent a letter to the university and also contacted the student, who was reprimanded but not removed from his student government board as a result of his daring use of the n-word to illustrate a point. UNL has taken no action; however the Chancellor indicated new rules will be implemented in the spring semester. AFCON will continue to monitor the issue.

NSAA VULGARITY "GUIDELINES:": Haller reported the Nebraska State Activities Association is developing rules to downgrade students who use dirty words or do/say anything remotely associated with s*x in theatrical productions, speeches and other school-sponsored activities. A motion was made by Parker, second by Black, that AFCON, through its duly-appointed President, write a letter to NSAA regarding the academic freedom issues associated with the proposed "guidelines." Motion carried on a voice vote.

PLANS FOR 2014: Adair reported the "Tinker Tour," starring Mary Beth Tinker and sponsored by the Student Press Law Center, is planning its spring tour. Deadline to invite the Tinker Tour to our state is January 20. Parker will contact the Tour and if they accept our invitation Parker will organize the event(s) with Adair's assistance.

Adair suggested AFCON develop a contest for high school students to either write a 500-word essay or film a 2-minute video nominating their teacher for "Nebraska Academic Freedom Teacher of the Year." The winning teacher and student will be invited to the AFCON annual meeting, and both teacher and student will receive a

prize. The AFCON board agreed by consensus that this is an idea worth pursuing.

Parker suggested AFCON consider doing a workshop about including university faculty in decision-making. Parker suggested another workshop could be a training workshop for nonprofits on how to lobby the state legislature.

MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION REPORTS: No reports were offered.

www.academicfreedomnebraska.org

February 8, 2014—

Present: Dwayne Ball, Nancy Comer, Claudia Garcia, Bob Haller, Laurie Thomas Lee, Lora Leibrandt, Cathi McMurtry, Dave Moshman, Linda Parker, Rod Wagner.

AGENDA: Leibrandt moved approval of the agenda. Wagner seconded. Passed without dissent.

TREASURER'S REPORT: McMurtry presented the treasurer's report dated February 7, 2014, showing a balance on hand of \$1381.88. It was noted that we used the one-time Kurz grant largely for this meeting, which is consistent with the intent of the grant, but we can't do that again. The treasurer's report will be filed for audit.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Moshman was authorized at the January meeting to send a letter on behalf of AFCON to the Nebraska School Activities Association regarding academic freedom issues associated with its new guidelines on vulgarity, etc. in high school speech and drama competitions. He reported that he has not yet sent a letter and recommended we consult with teachers, including appropriate organizations, and also with Doug Paterson. The NSAA may reconsider their guidelines after their March 2014 competition so we should find out more about what we can do that might help and when we should do it.

The Board has been monitoring UNL's "Not here, not now, not ever" campaign with respect to potential threats to intellectual freedom. Moshman reported that UNL mostly appears to be continuing what it has already been doing in addressing issues of diversity but we will continue to monitor. Parker suggested that if UNL wants to educate the campus community about diversity, AFCON could offer to teach about free speech as part of that.

(See Minutes, page 3)

Summaries of AFCON Board of Directors' Meetings (Continued from Page 2)

LEGISLATIVE LIAISON: The legislative liaison was absent with the same excuse as the secretary (very suspicious) but she provided a list of three bills of potential interest to be monitored. LB 729 would create a "Task Force on Expanded Learning Opportunities" that would include a position for a "representative from a nonprofit organization with an interest in education." That could be AFCON. LB 754 has the goal of "aligning career education programs with the state's economic and workforce needs," which seems to assume the purpose of public schools is to supply worker bees for businesses and corporations. LB 421CA is a constitutional amendment that would eliminate Nebraska's state board of education, state department of education, and commissioner of education.

SENTINEL: Material for the March issue should be sent to Tom Black by Feb. 24. We are continuing to work on getting a definitive list of email addresses and arranging for electronic distribution beginning with this issue.

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA: Wagner moved to authorize Parker to create an AFCON Facebook account linked to her name. Leibrandt seconded. Passed without dissent.

OSHER LIFELONG LEARNING INSTITUTE: Haller is continuing to work on organizing a six-week course on book banning and related matters for fall and continues to seek volunteers for specific sessions.

NATIONAL OUTREACH: Nothing new to report on plans for Edler, Haller, and Adair to present at the National Council of Teachers of English meeting this fall.

PLANS FOR 2014: There was considerable discussion of potential events and other ways of reaching out. Rainbow Rowell, a censored children's book author with local connections, was discussed as a possible speaker. There was concern that attendance at our annual meetings rarely goes much beyond our own members. There was discussion about getting corporate or other sponsors and/or specifically inviting representatives of organizations. It was noted that we must have an annual meeting each fall that includes nomination of officers for the following year but this could be a pro forma meeting if we decide to focus our efforts on other sorts of events or activities.

www.academicfreedomnebraska.org

Nebraska School Activities Association Content Standards Compliance Form

The Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) recently developed a "content standards compliance form" that Nebraska school administrators must sign in order for their schools to compete in state speech and drama competitions. AFCON is highly concerned about the restrictions on intellectual freedom imposed by these standards and is monitoring the situation. Please contact us if you have information about this or know of specific cases of censorship or self-censorship that have resulted from it.

NSAA Content Standards Compliance Form

Speech content has been carefully examined, and the performances are approved for presentation by the students of our school and are acceptable in our community. The school also takes responsibilities for royalty payments and permission granted from the author when required.

Standards. Directors shall eliminate or reject profane references to a deity, vulgarity, obscene language, actions or scenes. The administration of the school shall assure that the director complies with these requirements and that the speech does not offend the moral standards of the community. When speeches are examined and approved by the administration of the producing school, the material is eligible for presentation at any contest site. The signed Content Standards Compliance Form serves to certify that the materials presented have been carefully examined and approved for presentation. It is understood that a speech is subject to penalties through the judging process, if material is deemed inappropriate for high school performance.

Zero Tolerance for Intolerance

by David Moshman

Chris Rock may not be welcome at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Not that he's planning to come. But what he has to say would not be welcomed by the Chancellor and student government leaders, who don't like his kind of unwelcoming language.

On November 13, 2013, the UNL student senate debated and passed a resolution "encouraging a broadly inclusive and welcoming campus" that concluded:

Be it resolved, that as senators...we pledge to remove derogatory terms from our vocabulary (that may or may not be purposely directed as offensive) in regard to a person's gender, age, disability, genetic information, race, color, religion, pregnancy status, marital status, veteran's status, national or ethnic origin, gender identity or expression, place of residence, political affiliation, or sexual orientation.

Not all the senators supported the motion. In a speech that incorporated part of a Chris Rock routine, Senator Cameron Murphy, a graduate student in Nutrition, argued against the banning of words, noting that even the n-word can legitimately be used by some people in some contexts. Following Chris Rock, he used the words he was talking about.

Other student senators responded by calling for his impeachment. The senate voted to initiate impeachment proceedings against him.

But that was not enough for the Chancellor. On November 21, UNL Chancellor Harvey Perlman sent a special email message to all adminis-

trators, faculty, staff, and students to express his "disappointment." "Racial epithets and racial impersonations," he wrote, "are not acceptable anywhere but especially in an institution devoted to education and progress.

Responding in advance to anyone who might invoke intellectual freedom, academic freedom, or the First Amendment, he added: "We don't need to debate any nuance of free speech to conclude such language is harmful, despicable, and intolerable." Our intolerance of intolerance, in other words, must include intolerance of intolerant terms.

We must not "remain silent or indifferent," the Chancellor concluded, in the face of "outrages." The UNL community, he urged, should "rise up and say, 'Not here, not now.'"

And so it did. At a November 25 rally in the student union, hundreds of students kicked off a campaign for tolerance. Not satisfied to end racism temporarily, students extended the Chancellor's slogan across time: "Not here, not now, not ever!"

Meanwhile, the executive committee of the UNL Graduate Student Association published an open letter urging Senator Murphy to resign from the student senate for his "invocation of racial slurs." Although they acknowledged that his aim was "to defend freedom of speech," they deemed it unacceptable "to use such language in debate, no matter the reason."

Yes, no matter the reason. The letter went on to condemn Murphy for "defending the use of terms like the n-word and Negro through historical contextualization." Apparently, "historical contextualization" is part of the "nuance" that UNL does not want to see here, now, or ever.

Meanwhile, the executive committee met to consider Senator Murphy's fate in student government. The vote was 7 to 5 in favor of impeachment, one vote short of the 2/3 necessary to impeach. He refused to resign and remains in the senate, which later voted unanimously to censure him.

That's not the end of it, however. The Chancellor's December 20 end-of-semester message to the university community focused almost entirely on "the use of offensive language and insensitive racial imitation." The administration, he promised us, was "formulating a plan to address these issues" and would "report to all of you in January on the full scope of what we propose."

The full scope of responses to Cameron Murphy's speech? Now that January has come, I can hardly wait to see what's in store this semester.

Maybe we'll have a new slogan for the new year. "Not here, not now" showed conviction. "Not here, not now, not ever" showed passion. Perhaps 2014 will bring a truly comprehensive and uncompromising campaign against derogatory words: "Not here, not there, not now, not ever, and death to those who disagree!"

So join the campaign against intolerance, or death to you.

I hope it won't come to that. But when we're all intent on demonstrating the depth of our intolerance for intolerance, we shouldn't be surprised if the result is intolerance.

David Moshman is President of AFCON. This article originally appeared in The Huffington Post on January 16.

AFCON SPEAKER'S BUREAU (As of December 2007)

Peggy Adair: "Banned Books, Black Arm-bands, and School Prayer: The Evolution of Children's First Amendment Rights in America"
padair@tconl.com

Dwayne Ball: "Threats to Academic Freedom at Universities"
adball@neb.rr.com

Bob Haller: "Civics Education and the Practice of Freedom" and "How Books Can Harm You: Lessons from the Censors"
mshortt@inebraska.com

David Moshman: "Principles of Academic Freedom"
dmoshman1@unl.edu

John Bender and David Moshman: "Student Freedom of Expression/Student Rights"
jbender1@unl.edu
dmoshman1@unl.edu

Laurie Thomas Lee: "Implications of the USA Patriot Act"
llee1@unl.edu

Presentation of the Readers' Theatre production of A Tangled Web: Student Freedom of Expression.

(a cast of adults and students)

ADDRESS FOR THE AFCON WEB SITE
<http://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org>

Check it out and learn Who We Are and about Our Activities; read our Constitution; learn how to Join Us; see the where and when of our Meetings; meet our Members and Officers;

REQUEST FOR NEWS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The editor of the AFCON SENTINEL invites all AFCON individual and organizational members to send news about academic freedom issues in Nebraska or editorial comments for inclusion in this newsletter and/or announcements of organizational meetings for the UPCOMING EVENTS column.

Due date for submissions to the June 20, 2014, issue is May 26, 2014.

Send to Tom Black, editor, 610 West Park, West Point, NE 68788 or wpc6296@cableone.net

AFCON

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Mailing
Address
Label

ACADEMIC FREEDOM COALITION OF NEBRASKA

HELP AFCON PROMOTE ACADEMIC FREEDOM

As a member of AFCON, you can help us

- ◆ support applications of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including elementary and secondary schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
- ◆ educate Nebraskans about the meaning and value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, mutual respect, open communication, and uninhibited pursuit of knowledge, including the role of these ideals in academic contexts and in democratic self-government.
- ◆ assist students, teachers, librarians, and researchers confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of ideas.
- ◆ act as liaison among groups in Nebraska that support academic freedom.

MEMBERSHIP (To become a member, send dues, organization or individual name, address, and phone number to Cathi McMurtry, 515 N. Thomas Avenue, Oakland, NE 68045)

Organizational Membership (\$120) entitles the organization to one seat on the AFCON Board, one vote in the election of officers and at the annual meeting, eligibility for office and chairing standing committees, provides newsletter subscription for the board member to share with the organization's information director, and reduced rates to AFCON conferences for its members.

Individual Membership (\$15) provides newsletter subscription, eligibility for office and for chairing standing committees, reduced rates for AFCON conferences, and one vote at annual meetings.

Student Membership (\$5) entitles full-time students to the same privileges as provided by the Individual Membership.

**AFCON ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS, PLEASE DUPLICATE THIS NEWSLETTER FOR YOUR MEMBERS.
INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS, PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER TO A FRIEND AFTER YOU HAVE READ IT.
ENCOURAGE HIM OR HER TO JOIN AFCON**