



THE

AFCON

SENTINEL



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A Quarterly of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska

September 21, 2001

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President-Elect

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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—Dwayne Ball

Going Off Track

Professor Emeritus Wallace Peterson, upon receiving the James Lake Academic Freedom Award a few years ago from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Academic Senate, called it the greatest current threat to academic freedom. French poststructuralist philosopher Julia Kristeva, who originated the ideas behind it, now repudiates it, says her American academic colleagues have “simplified it [and] caricatured it,” and now believes it to be “totalitarian.” I am referring, of course, to political correctness and the identity politics that undergird it.

I can’t resist two more examples that will make shameful reading in future histories of academic freedom, causing our descendants to wonder how the American academy ever got so far off track. These accompany the ones I mentioned in the last issue, that being the second and this the third in a series of four president’s columns on threats to academic freedom in American universities.

History professor John Willard of North Hennepin Community College near Minneapolis was told by his college that he was to refrain in his lectures from using “examples which are

provocative or inflammatory” or “phraseology which does not manifest a clear concern for student sensibilities and which may promote student misunderstandings.” His crimes? Posting a picture of Custer on his door and quoting the writings of an early town father that Pocahontas was known to have somersaulted unclothed through Jamestowne. These offended some students, and the usual inquisition resulted in his suspension (later rescinded) and the aforementioned prior restraints on his classroom speech. He is, of course, suing, and perhaps he will cost the North Hennepin taxpayers enough in a damage judgment that they will remove the administrators who violated his academic freedom and rights to speak the truth as he sees fit.

Another history professor, Libero Marx Renzulli, Jr., at Fairleigh Dickinson University, was recently awarded \$5.3 million in back pay, pain and suffering, and punitive damages in a suit against the university. He actually had the temerity to stand up to a student, daughter of a rich alumnus, who demanded a better grade and threatened a trumped-up sexual harassment charge (using an obscenity offensive to women in the classroom—in fact, he used the

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Upcoming Events

AFCON Board Meetings, September 8, October 13, November 10
Gere Library, 56th and Normal, Lincoln, Nebraska; 10 AM

MINUTES of the AFCON Board of Directors

June 9, 2001—

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting (Williams/Ball) and the Treasurer's report (Moshman/Beckstead) which showed a balance of \$991.29. Treasurer McMurtry will mail statements to member organizations that have not paid their dues.

President Ball provided copies of LB 394, introduced by State Senator Adrian Smith, which would allow schools not to provide student information such as a phone number without written consent of the student's parents. The bill died in this session 2001. Ball also distributed correspondence from Senator Raikes regarding LB 394.

Moshman, AFCON Policy Coordinator, explained two approaches to religion that public schools can follow. After the Board discussed the options, it adopted (Beckstead/McMurtry) *A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools* as the AFCON policy.

Continuing an effort to recruit participants in the Elementary/Secondary AFCON Committee, President Ball will correspond with several NSEA members and locals to encourage service on the committee.

In a review of old business: Secretary Williams and President Ball will work together on a publicity project with NSEA. Treasurer McMurtry will complete the 501c3 forms. Ball reported the UNO

faculty leaders expressed interest in AFCON membership.

ACLU-Nebraska has not set a formal date for its annual meeting. Eventually Beckstead will pursue having AFCON hold its annual meeting in conjunction with that of ACLU-Nebraska.

Plans continue for AFCON participation in UNL's Big Red Day to be held August 26. Discussion ensued on whether to have an outside table with a sign or a tent table in the student union to publicize AFCON. Suggested draws to encourage the students to stop for AFCON materials centered around serving lemonade and conducting a poll on a current UNL issue of importance to the students. Discussion will continue at the next meeting.

July 14, 2001—

The secretary's minutes and the Treasurer's report showing a balance of \$1282.13, were received.

Membership continues to increase, though eleven member organizations are remiss in their annual dues. President Ball will send a reminder to each.

Pursuant to its adoption of *A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools*, published by the First Amendment Center, as its own policy statement, the AFCON directed that a summary be scanned onto the AFCON website (<http://firefly.unl.edu/afcon>) and printed in its newsletter, the *Sentinel*.

Moshman distributed copies of the Brown vs. Armenti case in which a professor was termi-

nated for refusing to change a student's grade. The professor assigned a failing grade to a student who missed 12 of 15 practicum lessons during a semester. The University's president ordered him to change the grade to "Incomplete," but the professor refused. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals in April 2001 ruled that the assignment of grades falls under the university's responsibility to determine how a course should be taught.

In a review of old business, Ball reported that the UNO faculty continues to pursue AFCON membership and Ball will letter the larger NSEA locals to join AFCON.

Moshman suggested using the UNL *Beginning Teachers' Newsletter* for AFCON publicity, and he requested that Beckstead write about her censorship experiences. Since the registration deadline for UNL's Big Red Day had passed, the Board tabled plans for AFCON to become involved in that activity. Also the Board tabled completion of the 501c3 forms.

Krutz reported that the AFCON Speakers' Bureau was updated and revisions will be printed in the September issue of the *Sentinel*.

The Board approved the purchase of an exhibit of the history of censorship in the United States. The display will be a valuable addition to AFCON presentations.

Going Off Track (Continued from page 1.)

word “pusillanimous.”) The provost and dean, exhibiting a now-familiar pusillanimity, backed the student and her father, and demanded a grade change (this for a student who believed World War I was started by the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.) They held the sexual harassment charge over his head as a threat. Professor Renzulli eventually became suicidal and had to stop teaching. When the matter finally came to trial, the jury was outraged enough to award him the equivalent of several hundred students’ annual tuition, or probably around a hundred year’s worth of his own pay!

These are just two more cases to add to the dozens I could cite. Somehow, through some bizarre and tortured process, American academia has come to believe that my right not to be offended as a man or woman, gay or straight, white or ethnic, is superior to your right to speak the truth as you see it, using the words you want to use, using the symbols that

are meaningful to you. Somehow, we have come to believe in something our ancestors would have thought of — and our descendants will surely think of — as the product of a disordered mind. That is, that opinions about race or sex or similar topics are so powerful that their mere expression in a university destroys the ability of mature and capable people to learn or work. “Diversity” and “sensitivity” are now the excuses for censorship and witch hunts, just as “national security” was in the McCarthy era.

I could not put it better than Norah Vincent, who said in a recent syndicated column: “Diversity, in the true sense of the word, is good. No one committed to liberty and equal opportunity disputes that. Every fair-minded person wants America to live up to its promises. To be inclusive. To be sex-, class-, color-, race- and lifestyle-blind. The problem is that multiculturalism, in its current form — identity politics — has been having quite the opposite effect. It excludes. It estranges the very cultures it purports to integrate, by overem-

phasizing rather than de-emphasizing the categories that keep us from seeing each other as human beings. And only by seeing each other as unique, irreducibly complex individuals rather than as prototypes of gay, Asian-American, bourgeois masculinity or straight, white, working-class femininity and so on, can we avoid the very separatist, clannish hatreds that are endemic to fascism. Do I blame leftist academics for the world’s problems? Of course not. But as the French writer Julien Benda said, it is treasonous for intellectuals to lend themselves and their ideas to the base uses of tyranny. Perhaps it is time we thought more carefully about what multiculturalism really means and how best to achieve it.”

In my mind, there is only one way to begin any worthwhile task in American universities, and that is to rededicate ourselves to the principles of academic freedom — that the university is a place where all ideas are freely expressed and freely discussed, without fear of any consequences whatsoever.

FOR SALE BY AFCON

Send orders to Mel Krutz, 2625 Bluff Road, Seward, NE 68434-9801

T-shirts with a Paul Fell “banned books” design; Sizes M, L, XL, XXL, XXXL; \$15.00. Packaging and postage: \$2.00 each.

Note cards with a Paul Fell design; \$1.50; four for \$5.00. Packaging and postage: \$0.75 per packet.

Reader’s Theatre Script of a TANGLED ISSUE: Student Freedom of Expression. \$10.00 buys the book with rights to duplicate the script and produce the play. Packaging and postage: \$2.00 each.

A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools

A Publication of the First Amendment Center

A summary

Each day millions of parents from diverse religious backgrounds entrust the education of their children to the teachers in our nation's public schools. For this reason, teachers need to be fully informed about the constitutional and educational principles for understanding the role of religion in public education.

This teacher's guide is intended to move beyond the confusion and conflict that has surrounded religion in public schools since the early days of the common school movement. For most of our history, extremes have shaped much of the debate. On one end of the spectrum are those who advocate promotion of religion (usually their own) in school practices and policies. On the other end are those who view public schools as religion-free zones. Neither of these approaches is consistent with the guiding principles of the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment.

Fortunately, however, there is another alternative that is consistent with the First Amendment and broadly supported by many educational and religious groups. The core of this alternative has been best articulated in *Religious Liberty, Public Education, and the Future of American Democracy*, a statement of principles issued by 24 national organizations. Principle IV states:

*Public schools may not inculcate nor inhibit religion. They must be places where religion and religious conviction are treated with fairness and respect. Public schools uphold the First Amendment when they protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths or none. Schools demonstrate fairness when they ensure that the curriculum includes study **about** religion, where appropriate, as an important part of a complete education.*

Copies of this ten-page Teacher's Guide may be requested from
First Amendment Center, 1207 18th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212
or call 1-800-830-3733 and request Publication No. 99-F02 A.

CENSORSHIP

How is it present in today's Nebraska School Libraries and Classrooms?

By Mel Krutz

Are you aware of any book, video, computer, student publications, programs, activities, or any other kind of material or event having been challenged in a school library or classroom, or of situational censoring that hinders or stifles students, parents, or teachers in political, economical, or sociological ways?

Examples of the latter might be: pullback of funding specifically to hinder the acquiring of specific resources or a severing of communication to remove input in decision-making, or applying pressure about one's employment to limit or assure a result.

Tell about it. For example discuss:

- **What** medium, materials, or situation was involved? (Give titles if possible.)
- **When** did it occur? What **reason** was given for the challenge?
- **Who** initiated the challenge?
- Was the material **removed** or the situation **curtailed** to meet the request or demand of the censor? How was it **resolved**?
- Name the **school** or area of Nebraska, and give **your** name and school, if possible. (Not required if circumstances warrant anonymity.)

AFCON SPEAKER'S BUREAU (As of November 1999)

Dwayne Ball: "Threats to Academic Freedom at Universities"
3120 Jasper Ct., Lincoln, NE 68516
dball@alltel.net

Linda Beckstead: "Freedom of Student Press Issues"
3919 Davenport, Omaha, NE 68131
becksteadl@aol.com

John Bender: "The Nebraska Student Freedom of Expression Bill"
3609 S. 20 St., Lincoln, NE 68508
jrbender@unl.edu

Bob Haller: "Money Talks: Ideas in the Political Process" and "Religion, Intellectual Freedom, and the University"
4000 S. 56th St., Lincoln, NE 68506
rhaller1@unl.edu

Carol MacDaniels: "Street Language and Student Writing"
4740 Grassridge Rd., Lincoln, NE 68512
cmaddani@unl.edu

David Moshman: "Principals and Principles: Convincing Administrators and Everyone Else, to Support Academic Freedom"
1901 Pepper Ave., Lincoln, NE 68502
dmoshman1@unl.edu

Presentation of the Readers' Theatre production of A Tangled Web: Student Freedom of Expression (a cast of adults and students)

"Intellectual Property"

By the Nebraska Board of Regents

In its July meeting, the Nebraska Board of Regents approved a policy establishing ownership of "intellectual property," which includes research, writings and other creative works produced by NU faculty, staff and students.

The policy says works created with the substantial use of university resources will be owned by the university.

Regents said the university must be careful how the policy is carried out to make sure faculty members are treated fairly. They said care must be taken when patents are involved.

—the *Omaha World-Herald*

To access the web page of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska (AFCON,)

go to

<http://firefly.unl.edu/afcon>

There one can find the officers, the organizational members, the Constitution, the Principles of Academic Freedom, the Policy Statement on Sexuality and Academic Freedom, and procedures on how to become a member of AFCON.

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 **December 21**, 2001, issue is **November 25**, 2001.

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 (\$100) entitles the organization to one seat on the AFCON Board and one vote in the election of officers and at the annual meeting, and eligibility for office and chairing standing committees and 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 (\$10) 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**