



THE

# AFCON

SENTINEL



Volume X, Number 4

A Quarterly of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska

December 15, 2006

## AFCON OFFICERS

Robert Haller  
President

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Barbara Cornelius  
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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—Robert Haller

The “Strategic Plan for Diversity” posted on the UNL Chancellor’s web site is a prime example of the ways in which Academic Freedom can be undermined by the imposition of inappropriate policy upon an educational institution. It is a prime example as well of how language not subject to academic scrutiny can create confusion and misdirection in the community of an educational institution.

The AFCON Board has attacked the Plan in various media and continues to do so. Dwayne Ball with Professor Gerry Harbison of Chemistry put a letter in the *Daily Nebraskan*. Policy Coordinator David Moshman appeared before the UNL Faculty Senate to present his analysis of it; the Senate decided to send his analysis up to the Chancellor as its response to the document. My analysis appeared in the *Lincoln Journal Star* as a Community Comment.

No one should get the idea that AFCON is opposed to “diversity.” Dedication to Academic Freedom means the welcoming of diversity in ideas, points of view, and approaches to study. It means opening the curriculum to the full range of relevant material. It presupposes the impossibility of outside limitations on the content of courses, and it requires of its proponents a constant attempt to test courses for the proper focus and coverage. A diversity plan might well mandate such an examination; it cannot dictate the outcome. We hope that the plan will be scrapped and that whatever plan takes its place will give primacy to these principles.

There is another aspect of the plan which is worth commenting on. The principle of Shared Governance complements Academic Freedom. Since teaching professionals have primary responsibility for curriculum, degree programs, hiring and promotion, they should also have responsibility for the policy statements which gov-

ern those processes. The Diversity Plan to which we have objected does not list a single faculty member among the writers. As a consequence, the language of the plan is not properly directed to the needs of the professionals who must be governed by it. It suffers, in some degree, from the fact that it is not phrased in such a way as to promote understanding within the context of a University. Let me look at a couple of examples.

The document begins as follows:

“Diversity is the multiplicity of people, cultures, and ideas that contribute to the richness and variety of life...”

This statement is hopelessly confused. Diversity refers to qualities and multiplicity to quantities. Qualities in quantity may “enrich” and will certainly create “variety;” but not all variety enriches. The form of the statement excludes from diversity any qualities which do not enrich. There is no specification or reference for the “life” which is enriched. The kindest interpretation that can be given the statement is as follows: it asserts that differences and a lot of them add something to life, but that diversity and multiplicity which do not enrich are not diversity and multiplicity.

I think I know what the statement is supposed to say to me. It assumes I know there is a problem at the University of Nebraska, arising from both the presence and the absence of difference in people, in cultures and in ideas. The presence of diversity may bring out prejudice and hostility and fear; its absence may produce complacency and arrogance and ignorance of essential features of our world. The University may well be improved by the removal of these negative effects of diversity; so the statement pretends that there are no negatives, and that by the magic of assertion these negatives will be replaced by enriched lives.

(Continued to Page 2)

## Upcoming Events

AFCON Board Meetings, January 13, February 10, March 10, 2007  
Loren Eiseley Library, 1530 Superior, Lincoln, Nebraska; 10 AM

**THE PRESIDENT—Robert Haller**

(Continued from Page 1)

Here is another statement, one of the goals of the Plan:

All units will assess their diversity curricula and extracurricular initiatives for the impact on student learning and outcomes; this curricula and programming will be periodically reported up to the deans and directors of each unit. Suppose I am a member of a "unit"—for the purposes of this discussion, the Department of English. We have a curriculum: it is manifest in a list of courses identified by time period, author, genre, region or ethnicity of authors, writing required, or critical approach. But how am I to identify our "diversity curricula"? Are these some part of our curriculum? We of course "assess" our courses and curriculum. We assign grades, administer student evaluations, and collect port-

folios to see what students learn. But what is this "reporting up" that we are supposed to do?

Again, I think I know what the statement means. Its writers don't know that curriculum is singular and curricula is plural. And that mean that we are supposed to include courses which can be identified as focused on some element of diversity: gender, ethnicity or region, for instance. And somehow we are to find out whether students will profess to be more open to diversity. The document uses terms like "modeling respect and inclusiveness" and "demonstrating multicultural competencies," and suggests that these are teaching styles and "outcomes."

But these make no reference to the content of academic study nor to

methods of demonstrating intellectual mastery. They assume that education is manners and performance.

I have spent some time on this matter because the language of this document diverges so much from academic study as to be insulting and demeaning. Academic life requires a quality of community that cannot suffer the foolishness of this language. American higher education maintains its reputation as the best and the most accessible in the world. Interference from undisciplined well-meaning outsiders can only degrade the operation. Behavioral manipulation and role-playing are not education. Improved interaction between diverse groups and improved mastery of education happens as the result of intellectual work, not assertion of inclusiveness and the repression of difference.

**Summaries of AFCON Board of Directors' Meetings—Karen Buckley****September 9, 2006—**

**Present:** Peggy Adair, Dwayne Ball, Karen Buckley, Bob Haller, Dick Herman, Mel Krutz, Laurie Thomas Lee, Cathi McMurtry, Dave Moshman, Susan Oles, and Doug Paterson.

**Minutes:** (Buckley) Minutes of the July 8 board meeting were approved.

**Treasurer's report:** (McMurtry) With a balance of \$1,367.65, 44 individual members, and 16 organizational members current with dues the report was approved.

**President's report:** Haller is recruiting membership in AFCON and has talked with the Nebraska Academy of Sciences and the Nebraskans for Arts, an advocacy group. The first declined membership at this time.

**Legislative Report/Ad hoc Committee on Student Rights Legislation:**

Haller reported that Joe Higgins, a member of the Nebraska State Board of Education which is creating the Civics Nebraska Partnership Advisory Council, suggested that the Advisory Council might be the place to begin with a proposal for students' rights. After discussion, the board authorized Haller to propose a draft of policies to include this statement: "The exercise of students' constitutional rights and responsibilities is essential to civics education," as part of the "Organizational Policies of the Civics Nebraska Partnership Advisory Council." Higgins further suggested that student advocates are needed in pursuit of passage of student rights legislation. Board members felt that

the Nebraska Association of Student Councils and members of the State Board of Education should be invited to AFCON's annual meeting. Adair and Ball proposed the creation of a Students' Bill of Rights document (other states have this.) possibly in conjunction with the ACLU.

**Membership Reports:** Krutz circulated posters for The Nebraska Book Festival Oct. 6-7 at Wesleyan University ([www.nebraskabookfestival.org](http://www.nebraskabookfestival.org).) She requested board members staff the AFCON table. Children's activities are a new addition to the festival. Paul Olson will be honored with the Mildred Bennett Award.

Ball reported on ACLU's observance of Banned Book Week, with two free events September 28 at 7 p.m. at Lee Bookseller's in Lincoln and September 29th at 7 p.m. in Omaha. The events will feature readings from famous censored literature, performed by The Angels Company and a discussion on reasons why books are challenged and how communities respond, led by ACLU Nebraska Legal Director Amy Miller

Paterson said UNO's Faculty Senate has appointed him as its permanent representative to AFCON. He acknowledged the publicity regarding UNO (i.e., Regents' concerns regarding finances and accounting practices in the athletic department.). A hearing was held in regard to the termination of a faculty member; no official results yet..

Lee noted that UNL's hiring practices are indicating a trend towards contract rather than

tenure positions.

**New Business:** AFCON's annual meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, December 2. Cost for the lunch is \$15. Student Freedom of Expression is the theme. The board voted to honor Susan Baird, a former journalism teacher at Bellevue East, and Matt Deabler, Central High School journalism teacher, with AFCON Academic Freedom Awards.

A discussion was held regarding the upcoming television "docudrama," "The Path to 9/11." Critics feel the show is libelous and fictional. The board felt that objections to the show were not an academic freedom issue.

**Informational note:** The website for the Nebraska Association of Student Councils is [www.nasc.org](http://www.nasc.org). Its e-mail and mailing addresses are [info@nasc.org](mailto:info@nasc.org) and 11962 Lewiston Lane, Gretna NE 68028 (402) 332-5057.

**October 14, 2006—**

**Present:** Peggy Adair, Dwayne Ball, Tom Black, Karen Buckley, Bob Haller, Susan Helmink, Dick Herman, Mel Krutz, Laurie Thomas Lee, Cathi McMurtry, Dave Moshman, Susan Oles, and Doug Paterson.

**Opening:** Susan Helmink was welcomed as the new representative for the Nebraska High School Press Association.

**Minutes:** September 9 minutes approved.

**Treasurer's report:** The treasurer's report showing a balance of \$1,175.99, 46 individual and 16 organizational members current with dues was filed for audit. (Cont. to Page 3.)

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

**President's report:** Haller attended the Nebraska High School Press Association convention to which he also took AFCON materials. UNL has compiled a report that includes a section on the termination of the four UNL professors who were recipients of the 2003 AFCON Academic Freedom Awards. Haller said faculty members feel the report glossed over the turmoil resulting from budget concerns. The UNL Faculty Senate wants to meet to discuss it. No faculty was involved in writing the report.

**Website:** Barb Cornelius has asked to be on the agenda for the November meeting to explain new website features.

**Policy:** Moshman addressed the proposed UNL diversity plan, distributing hard copies of the plan and his concerns. He prefaced his report by noting that UNL now hires "professors of practice" who teach full time and are not eligible for tenure who are especially vulnerable to pressures such as those imposed by the diversity plan. Faculty may comment on the proposal until October 31. To Haller's knowledge, there had been no prior faculty input. The board approved that Haller create a critique to be sent as a press release to newspapers including the University's and to the *Lincoln Journal Star* as a guest editorial, stating also, that it be emailed to the AFCON board members for review before the finished document is sent to the University and area newspapers.

**Legislative Report:** Adair distributed copies of the Douglas County Voters' Guide prepared by the League of Women Voters. Information of candidates for state offices make it applicable statewide.

**Ad hoc Committee on Student Rights Legislation:** Ball noted that the theme of this year's annual meeting is student freedom of expression.

**Membership reports:** Paterson (UNO Faculty Senate) noted that UNO has a new chancellor. Still controversial is the denial of reappointment of Pam Owens of UNO's College of Arts and Sciences. He suggests that when the Board of Regents takes official action, it might become an issue for AFCON, because academic freedom issues may be included.

Black (NSEA) said that NSEA is spending time and money opposing Initiative 423, which could have dire effects on education in Nebraska (k-12 and higher education,) among other institutions, if enacted.

Lee (UNL Faculty Senate) said the Faculty Senate is working to combat plagiarism. One thought is to include cheating and plagiarism violations on student transcripts.

Helmink (NHSPA:) Academic freedom issues continue to exist in the Northeast High School journalism department having been brought to AFCON's attention also in the past.

Ball (ACLU) said that ACLU involvement in academic freedom issues have included prayers at graduation, the required recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance by students and teachers, and freedom of speech violations. He noted that students confuse the Bill of Rights with the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment.

Adair said that the League of Women Voters has asked Jerry Bexton, retired Omaha Central High School principal, to speak on student freedoms. The League is conducting a two-year study of education in Nebraska, including academic freedoms, students, teacher pay, No Child Left Behind, and consolidation. Adair proposed that AFCON should invite the new Unicameral members to its annual meeting. In the September board meeting, she suggested publishing a student book to inform students of their constitutional rights. Adair will talk to ACLU Legal Director Amy Miller about this and report to the November board meeting. Adair's "Evolution of First Amendment Rights for Children in America" will be added to the AFCON speakers' bureau.

Oles (NELAC) said Charlie Gould of Millard South is the new president of NELAC.

Krutz (NCB) thanked the four AFCON members (Lee, Ball, Haller, and McMurtry) who staffed the AFCON table at the recent Nebraska Book Festival. She was one of more than 100,000 who attended the National Book Festival in Washington D.C. She suggested that AFCON make bookmarks on Nebraska defense of books to distribute at next year's Festival and other functions. She noted that the Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Center for the Book will be November 5, at 2 p.m. at the Center for Great Plains Studies, followed there by a reception.

Buckley (NEMA) noted that the Nebraska Library Association/Nebraska Educational Media Association's annual conference is October 26-27 at the Quest Center in Omaha. AFCON will have a table.

**Old Business:** Catherine Witt, former president of the now inactive Student Advocates for Academic Freedom at UNL, was elected as an at-large AFCON board member.

Academic Freedom Awards will be given to Susan Quint, Susan Baird and Matt Deabler at the December 2 meeting. All will be invited to be on the Student Freedom of Expression panel. Haller will order the plaques.

The nominating committee will present the slate of officers at the annual meeting.

Nominees are president-elect, Nancy Comer; secretary, Buckley; and treasurer, McMurtry. AFCON made its annual \$25 donation to the Harvest of Books fund drive.

**New Business:** Haller proposed creating a more professional newsletter by upgrading the printing at approximately an increased cost of \$300 annually. AFCON finances, including annual dues, will be discussed at the next meeting. No action was taken on changing the newsletter printing method.

The annual meeting will be held at 10 a.m. December 2. Cost for the lunch is \$15. Student Freedom of Expression is the theme.

### November 11, 2006—

**Present:** Peggy Adair, Dwayne Ball, Tom Black, Karen Buckley, Jim Bunstock, Barbara Cornelius, Dick Herma, Mel Krutz, Cathi McMurtry, Dave Moshman, Susan Oles, and Doug Paterson.

**Minutes:** (Buckley) Minutes of the Oct. 14 board meeting were approved.

**Treasurer's report:** (McMurtry) The report showed a balance of \$1,176.33, with 46 individual members and 17 organizational members current with dues. The treasurer's report was approved.

**President's report:** Paterson for Haller reported that panel on Student Freedom of Expression will include Joe Higgins of the Nebraska State Board of Education, Academic Freedom Award winners Susan Baird and Matt Deabler, and two high school students. Joe Rowson of Civics Nebraska is also invited.

Last month's discussion of the proposed UNL diversity plan resulted in a critique written by Ball and Gerry Harbison and published in the *Daily Nebraskan*; an analysis by Moshman submitted to the UNL Faculty Senate, which resulted in his being invited to address the Senate; his critique forwarded to the Board of Regents as the Faculty Senate's response to the proposed plan; and a guest editorial in the *Lincoln Journal Star* by Haller.

The state conference of AAUP has not appointed a new representative to AFCON but is interested in gaining co-sponsorship with AFCON to invite one of "the 100 most dangerous academics" (Dana and/or Michael Berube) to speak on academic freedom.

**Policy:** Moshman's reported on the UNL diversity plan in the president's report.

**Website:** Cornelius demonstrated how to log-in to AFCON's web site and how to edit the contents, once one has logged in. Please contact her with any questions concerning log-in names and passwords.

**Ad hoc Committee on Student Rights Legislation.** Adair has contacted ACLU Legal Director Amy Miller, who was interested

(Continued on Page 4.)

## California Protects Student Press

By Leigh A. Neithardt

In August, California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law a bill prohibiting censorship of college presses by administrators. California is the first state in the country to enact such a law. State assembly member Leland Yee authored the bill, which amends the state's education code.

"College journalists deserve the same protections as any other journalist. Allowing a school administration to censor is contrary to the democratic process and the ability of a student newspaper to serve as the watchdog and bring sunshine to the actions of school administrators," Yee said in a press release.

The impetus for the bill was a 2005 ruling in *Hosty v. Carter* by the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. In 2003, editors at *The Innovator*, the student-run paper at Governors State University in Illinois, argued that administrators could not dictate the paper's contents. Dean Patricia Carter contended that she had the right to review and censor the publication before it went to press. A three-judge panel agreed with the students' contention that their First Amendment rights were being violated.

On January 1, 2007, when California's new law takes effect, that will no longer be possible. In a press release, Schwarzenegger said, "Freedom of speech is the cornerstone of our democracy. Students working on college newspapers deserve the same rights afforded to every other student journalist."

The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that decision last year, citing a 1988 Supreme Court ruling in a similar case, *Hazelwood District v. Kuhlmeier*, which supported the right of high school officials to authorize content in a student-run newspaper. Shortly after the appeals court decision was handed down, California State University's general counsel wrote a memo to the university presidents saying that "the case appears to signal that CSU campuses may have more latitude than previously believed to censor the content of subsidized student newspapers," according to the Student Press Law Center.

November/December 2006 issue of *Academe*, the magazine of the American Association of University Professors.

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### AFCON Board Minutes

(Continued from Page 3.)

in the concept of formulating a Nebraska student bill of rights. Adair will be in touch with the new Nebraska ACLU director, Laurel Marsh.

**Membership reports:** Paterson (UNO Faculty Senate) suggested it might be time to address the Nebraska Board of Regents about the concept and importance of academic freedom. More discussion on this suggestion is planned for the December meeting. Paterson was congratulated on his goal of obtaining five percent of the general vote for his Secretary of State candidacy, which will give the Green Party ballot rights for the next election.

Krutz (NCB) said the recent annual meeting of the Nebraska Center for the Book was "wonderful" and well attended.

Buckley noted that AFCON had an informational table at the recent NLA/NEMA conference.

Burnstock (NWG) reported that the recent fall conference of the Nebraska Writers Guild at the University of Nebraska at Kearney proved a good collaboration with the newly formed Kearney Literary Festival.

**Old Business:** AFCON received a thank you note for the recent donation to the Harvest of Books fund drive. Board members approved the concept of formulating a Nebraska student bill of rights. Board members agreed that all returning and newly elected state senators should be invited, at their own expense, to AFCON's annual meeting.

## AFCON SPEAKER'S BUREAU (As of December 2007)

Peggy Adair: "Banned Books, Black Armbands, 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

Linda Beckstead: "Freedom of Student Press Issues"  
becksteadlinda@cox.net

Bob Haller: "Civics Education and the Practice of Freedom" and "How Books Can Harm You: Lessons of the Censors"  
rhaller1@unl.edu

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

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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.AFCONebr.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; Study our Publications, Principles, and Statements**

### FOR SALE BY AFCON

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

Reader's Theatre Script (a booklet,) TANGLED ISSUE: Student Freedom of Expression.  
\$10.00 buys the book with full duplication and production rights..  
Packaging and postage: \$3.00 each.

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

### 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 **March 17, 2007**, issue is **February 19, 2007**.

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

## University Reports by Dwayne Ball

My sources for these reports are the Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE) the newsletters of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), and other sources as noted.

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The University of New Hampshire - Durham will defend the academic freedom and free speech rights of a controversial professor who believes the government of the U.S. is implicated in the 9/11 acts of terror. William Woodward, a professor of psychology, is a member of Scholars for 9/11 Truth. Governor John Lynch has called his views "crazy and offensive," and has asked why he is teaching at a state university. The Board of Trustees has mounted an investigation, but others at the university - including members of the Board - have come to the defense of his academic freedom. However, Brigham Young University has placed Steven E. Jones, a senior professor of physics, also a member of 9/11 Scholars for truth, on leave because of his views (CHE 8/31/06 and 9/11/06)

Columbia University re-instated the Men's Ice Hockey club one week after suspending their season. The club, called the Lions, had posted fliers around campus with the tagline, "Stop being a pussy," a pun on the team name. The same tagline had appeared on a T-shirt sponsored by the student government two years ago, with no repercussions. The Ice Hockey team's use of the tagline, however, provoked not only a suspension of the season, but also one of those "Community Principles of Civility" efforts by elements of the student government. Someone noticed the hypocrisy after FIRE brought it to their attention. (FIRE newsletter, 10/5/06)

Comedian and columnist Dave Barry once wrote, "As Americans we must always remember that we all have a common enemy, an enemy that is dangerous, powerful, and relentless. I refer, of course, to the federal government." Marquette University philosophy Ph.D. student Stuart Ditsler posted this pithy little quote on his office door

The department chair removed it, saying that the office door was not a "free speech zone." Other materials offensive to those on the political right, however, remain on office doors.

For now, the University of North Dakota will continue to use its "Fighting Sioux" mascot. The NCAA had told it to change the mascot to something less offensive ("Fighting Irish" is already taken), or be denied the opportunity to play in post-season tournament games. A judge enjoined the NCAA from enforcing the ban; this injunction suggests how he will rule in the case.

### CLASSROOM EXPRESSION

Bellevue Community College (WA) has suspended without pay, for one week, a math teacher who created a test question involving an object dropped from the top of a building. The object was a watermelon and the dropper was named "Condoleeza." Some found this offensive as a racial stereotype. Professor Peter Ratener publicly apologized, but was still suspended. He has turned to FIRE for help. (FIRE Newsletter 9/13/06)

### STUDENT ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Marshall University of West Virginia has dropped a statement from its catalog that only African-Americans could enroll in 3 particular sections of a freshman orientation class. After pressure from FIRE, Marshall seemed to realize that such restrictions on class enrollment were illegal. (FIRE Newsletter 8/10/06)

Columbia University's Teachers College requires students to "possess a commitment to social justice." Despite negative publicity, they have yet to retract this political litmus test for a teaching degree. (FIRE newsletter 10/11/06)

A panel of the Pennsylvania state legislature, after four hearings on academic freedom at state universities, found insufficient evidence for the state to act to protect students from being exposed to left-wing propaganda in the classroom. However, they asked all universities in the state to provide more

open complaint and redress procedures for students who believed that they were subject to propaganda rather than teaching. (CHE 11/15/06)

### STUDENT PRESS FREEDOM

Johns Hopkins University has dropped its investigation against the student editors of a conservative student newspaper, the Carrollton Record. The paper had criticized an event sponsored by a GLBT campus organization featuring a pornography star. However, Johns Hopkins has not apologized for its confiscation of the newspaper nor its removal of its right to distribute in the dormitories. (FIRE newsletter 9/21)

### STUDENT ADMISSION RIGHTS

The Michigan Civil Rights Initiative passed 58/42 on November 7. This initiative forbids any agency of the state to discriminate in contracts, admission, employment, etc., on the basis of race or sex. The University of Michigan was at the center of controversy regarding race-based admissions, and was given a kind of a limited approval to use race in discriminating against whites, Asians, and males in admission to the U of M, in the 2003 Gratz v. Bollinger decision before the US Supreme Court. Now, the Gratz v. Bollinger ruling, it appears, will apply everywhere BUT Michigan, and also California and Washington, which passed similar initiatives.

### FACULTY EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

"A special committee from the American Association of University Professors will meet ... with public-college officials in Louisiana this week as part of an investigation into layoffs, program cuts, and other moves at the colleges in the wake of Hurricane Katrina." (CHE, 8/28/06)

The AAUP has proposed that adjunct faculty who have taught at least 12 courses in 7 years should be given a "comprehensive review" and if found adequate, a kind of "part-time tenure" that would protect them against arbitrary contract termination. (CHE 9/13/06)

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## NCTE/SLATE INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AWARD NATIONAL AWARDEE—DAVID MOSHMAN

AFCON Policy Coordinator **Dave Moshman** was recognized in November 2007 by the National Council of Teachers of English as one of two honorable mentions for its Intellectual Freedom Award. The remarks below were read on his behalf at the national convention.

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I am honored to receive this recognition from an organization I have long recognized as a premier defender of intellectual freedom in education. I am grateful to the Nebraska English/Language Arts Council for nominating me, and I thank Clark Kolterman, Bob Haller, and Dwayne Ball for preparing the nomination materials.

Let me congratulate the Blue Springs Board of Education on its award and commend it for standing with its administrators in defense of the right of students to a curriculum designed on academic grounds by their teachers. In the case of Blue Springs, we see a system of academic freedom functioning as it should to promote and protect the quality of education. The teachers made responsible curricular decisions, the administrators provided appropriate processes for addressing parental concerns and complaints, and the school board recognized and upheld the integrity of the system. That sounds simple enough, but when faced with parental, political, religious, and financial pressures, school boards often forget their most fundamental responsibility to the academic integrity of the educational enterprise. I am happy to join in commending a board that recognized its responsibility to academic freedom.

I also want to congratulate Judy Martin and Fredonia Ray, who

are being recognized for defending, at great personal cost, the responsibility of teachers for curriculum. We often talk of such matters with respect to the constitutional or contractual rights of teachers, but what is most fundamentally at stake here, I think, is the right of the students to a curriculum devised on academic grounds by their teachers, individually and collectively. It is the role of teachers to provide such a curriculum, and academic freedom is what makes it possible for teachers to do their jobs.

Much of the work for which I am being recognized was done in connection with the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska, known as AFCON. AFCON was founded in 1988 as a coalition of Nebraska organizations concerned with intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. The initiative for organizing it came from Mel Krutz, a longtime NCTE activist for academic freedom, who has remained a mainstay within AFCON ever since its founding. AFCON currently has nearly 20 organizational members, including the Nebraska English/Language Arts Council.

AFCON defines academic freedom as “intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts.” Let me note three important aspects of this definition, after which I will conclude by urging each of you to go home and found something like AFCON in your own state.

First, academic freedom is not limited to the First Amendment. Rather it encompasses intellectual freedom generally, including freedoms of belief, expression, discussion, and inquiry, and this includes free access to information and ideas. Some aspects of academic freedom in American public education are protected by the First

Amendment rights of the individuals involved, but academic freedom is not limited to what is protected by the First Amendment.

Second, academic freedom is not limited to faculty. Note that AFCON’s definition refers simply to “intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts.” Student freedom to learn is no less important than faculty freedom to teach. In fact, as I have already suggested, students’ right to a curriculum determined on academic grounds is the fundamental basis for faculty autonomy in formulating that curriculum.

Finally, academic freedom is not limited to higher education. Learning and development at all ages are fostered by freedoms of belief, expression, discussion, and inquiry, including access to information and ideas. Thus intellectual freedom is central to education at all levels.

Academic freedom, then, encompasses the intellectual freedoms of students and faculty at all levels of education. Many organizations do excellent work defending the rights of particular groups of individuals in particular educational contexts. But every state needs a statewide coalition that unites students and faculty at all levels of education on behalf of academic freedom. For additional information about AFCON, see our website at: [www.AFCONebr.org](http://www.AFCONebr.org). That’s [www.AFCONebr.org](http://www.AFCONebr.org). And if you want to found an academic freedom coalition in your own state, feel free to call on us for guidance.

Thank you again for this recognition, and keep up the good work!

# AFCON

515 North Thomas Avenue  
Oakland, NE 68045.

Mailing  
Address  
Label

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## ACADEMIC FREEDOM COALITION OF NEBRASKA

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### 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**