



Search The Site

[More options](#) | [Back issues](#)

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Today's news](#)

[Current issue](#)

[Special issues & data](#)

[The Faculty](#)

[Research & Books](#)

[Government & Politics](#)

[Money & Management](#)

[Information Technology](#)

[Students](#)

[Athletics](#)

[International](#)

[Community Colleges](#)

[Short Subjects](#)

[Gazette](#)

[Corrections](#)

[Opinion & Forums](#)

[Careers](#)

[Sponsored information & solutions](#)

[Services](#)

[Help](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Manage your account](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[Rights & permissions](#)



THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Government & Politics

From the issue dated November 25, 2005

Pennsylvania Lawmakers Hold Hearings on Political Bias in College Classrooms

By JENNIFER JACOBSON

Pittsburgh



[Printer friendly](#)



[E-mail article](#)



[Subscribe](#)



[Order reprints](#)

The debate between liberals and conservatives entered a new phase this month as Pennsylvania lawmakers gathered here for the second of five hearings to investigate accusations that the state's public colleges are rife with liberal indoctrination.

The Select Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives met on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh to hear conflicting testimony from supporters and opponents of efforts to rid college classrooms of alleged political bias.

The House voted in July to establish the panel after some student complained that their professors had graded them unfairly because of their political views. The students also said the professors had used class time to talk about their own political opinions.

Rep. Gibson C. Armstrong, a Republican from Lancaster, Pa., introduced the resolution, HR 177, which established the committee. It expects to report its findings to the House in June, but if an extension is needed, could do so in November 2006. Last week Mr. Armstrong deemed the two-day hearing here a success

"It was an opportunity to get a better understanding of what goes on on a college campus," he said.

The investigation in Pennsylvania comes at a time when Republican lawmakers in several state legislatures have introduced a measure, known as the academic bill of rights, that they say will make college campuses more intellectually diverse. The measure has been promoted in a national campaign by David Horowitz, a California-based activist, but no legislature has passed Mr. Horowitz's bill so far. Critics, including many prominent professors and faculty groups, say the bill would give government officials control over academic matters that should be left to faculty members' professional judgment.

Activists or Educators?

During the hearing, Mr. Armstrong read aloud from some course descriptions and job advertisements, posted on Pennsylvania public-university Web sites, in which a commitment to social justice was presented in a course or required of a job candidate. "This is not viewpoint neutral," he said in a subsequent interview

"You can't hire people based on their political ideology."

Stephen H. Balch, president of the National Association of Scholars, a conservative group, testified that in the humanities and social sciences, professors view themselves as political activists rather than educators, to the detriment of intellectual rigor.

Mr. Balch outlined reforms legislators should expect universities to undertake, although without providing specifics. For instance, he said universities should make the same commitment to a diversity of political viewpoints as they have made to ethnic and gender diversity. He also called on lawmakers to intervene if universities do not make "a good-faith effort" to fix the problems he described.

Professors who appeared before the committee decried such intervention. The academic bill of rights "ironically infringes academic freedom in the very act of purporting to protect it," said Joan Wallach Scott, a professor of social sciences at the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, N.J., who is also a former chairwoman of the American Association of University Professors' Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure.

On the second day of the hearing, James V. Maher, the University of Pittsburgh's provost, testified that the institution has long had grievance procedures that students can follow if they believe a professor has discriminated against them on the basis of their political beliefs.

Mr. Maher said his office reviews the university's grievance procedures every three years, and that there has not been one case "where the complaint involved a student feeling they've been mistreated because of their political opinions."

After Mr. Maher's testimony, Rep. Thomas L. Stevenson, a Republican and the committee's co-chairman, asked for comment from David A. French, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, a watchdog group that has fought to do away with speech codes on college campuses, who serves as a legal adviser to the panel. Mr. Stevenson's invitation to Mr. French appeared to rankle one Democratic member of the committee, Rep. Dan A. Surra. Soon after Mr. French began speaking, Mr. Surra interrupted: "With all due respect, does Mr. French speak for the committee?"

"I asked Mr. French to comment on Pitt's procedures," Mr. Stevenson answered.

"I respect that," Mr. Surra said. "I just want it to be noted for the record he's speaking not necessarily for the committee."

"So noted," Mr. Stevenson said.

A Waste of Time

In her testimony before the panel, Ms. Scott said that the best

professors she "ever had were the ones who told us where they stood," adding that "a certain commitment to values and beliefs is not out of place in the classroom."

In an interview a few days after the hearing, Ms. Scott said "the bugaboo that Stephen Balch raised about advocacy was really pathetic." She said that Mr. Armstrong was "probably trying to make a reputation for himself" in his "very conservative" district of Lancaster, which explains why he introduced HR 177 in the first place.

Mr. Armstrong called Ms. Scott's theory "ridiculous."

Meanwhile, Democratic members of the panel said they thought its creation and the hearings were a waste of time. Representative Surra called HR 177 "a resolution in search of a problem" and said that he was opposed to the formation of the committee. It's "a colossal waste of time and taxpayers' money to go around the state and do this," he said.

In an interview, Mr. Surra said that he would send a letter to the panel's chairman and the chairman of the House education committee requesting an end to the hearings. "I'm sure it'll probably be ignored," he said.

The panel is scheduled to hold its next hearing in January in eastern Pennsylvania.

<http://chronicle.com>

Section: Government & Politics

Volume 52, Issue 14, Page A32

[Copyright](#) © 2005 by [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) | [Contact us](#)
[User agreement](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [About The Chronicle](#) | [Site map](#) | [Help](#)
[Subscribe](#) | [Advertise with us](#) | [Press inquiries](#) | [RSS](#) | [Today's most e-mailed](#)

[Home](#) | [Chronicle Careers](#) | [The Chronicle Review](#)

**Try 4 issues of The Chronicle
entirely at our expense**

CLICK FOR FREE OFFER



**So smart.
So easy.**